

PLUCK AND JUICE

COMPLETE
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

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JACK WRIGHT AND HIS PRAIRIE ENGINE; OR, AMONG THE BUSHMEN OF AUSTRALIA.

BY NONAME.



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CHAPTER I.

A PECULIAR MACHINE.

The village of Wrightstown, situated at the head of a small bay on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, was one of the most thriving of newly incorporated settlements, and was principally given up to the fishing industry.

It also boasted of many fine dwellings, and among them the mansion of the most celebrated boy inventor in the world, known as Jack Wright, whose father, a retired sea-faring man, had been a pioneer of the place and thus had come to have Wrightstown named after him ere he died.

From his father Jack had inherited a talent for inventing, and became famous when yet a boy for contriving many wonderful devices for overland travel, aerial flight and submarine navigation, electricity, magnetism and other great motive powers being his means of propulsion.

By the use of his patents the boy collected a fortune from various sources, and in his daring enterprises he had always been accompanied by two friends, who resided at his house with him.

The first was an old sailor of the navy, who had been a great friend of the boy's father, named Tim Topstay, and the other was a Dutch boy, a little older than himself, called Fritz Schneider, who had accidentally stumbled into Wrightstown, and thus met the young inventor.

It was toward the close of a warm summer day when the three friends were in a spacious brick workshop, built on the bank of a creek that ran in along the foot of Jack's garden from the bay.

They were busily employed putting the finishing touches to a new invention, which the boy had just completed building.

It was a strange-looking overland engine, mounted on eight cogged wheels, the platform of metal being crowned by a wire wheel-house, and an adjoining deck-house, the roof

of which curved down in back, while in front there was a leafed-shaped protection of steel, with a sharp point and knife-like edges, forming a terrible battering ram.

On top of the pilot-house stood an elongated searchlight, and from the roof of the railed deck-houses projected two huge ventilators, the front platform was furnished with three uprights, there were keen scythe blades projecting from the hubs of the wheels, and at the sides of the platforms were ladder-like steps for boarding or alighting from the engine.

The deck-houses were made of the strongest aluminum wire, the long, narrow side windows and those of the pilot-house were covered by finely woven, bullet proof aluminum wire screens, and a powerful series of electrical accumulator jars stowed away inside were connected by insulated wires with the complicated machinery to work the big driving-wheels.

By an automatic arrangement the wheel in the pilot-house easily turned the small front wheels, steering the engine in any direction, and the pilot-house was filled with gauges, indicators, meters, a compass and numerous racks of different kinds of firearms.

A door from the pilot-house led into a sleeping-room, back of that was a combined dining-room and kitchen, and the last compartment was utilized as a store-room for weapons, ammunition and other equipments for a war-like journey.

It also contained closets for storing food and tanks to hold water.

From a pole on the roof a flag fluttered out bearing the name of the Tempest.

As soon as Jack and his friends finished their work the boy sent the old sailor to the post-office for the mail and dispatched the Dutch boy to a neighboring store to make some purchases.

Left alone with his invention he examined it all over with an air of great pride, for the engine certainly was a graceful and handsome specimen of metal work, and was designed

to perform certain feats that seemed impossible in such a lightly built affair.

Jack Wright was a good-looking boy, with dark eyes and hair, rather sharp features, and possessed a compact, athletic figure.

He was courageous, daring and intrepid, well educated, manly and withal kind-hearted to the core.

"Her beauty is undoubted," he muttered, his eyes flashing with gratification, "and if she manages to travel as well as I calculate, and withstand the shocks which that bladed cow-catcher is designed to give, I'll be satisfied."

At that moment there came a ring for admittance at the electric door-bell, for the nature of Jack's inventions made the utmost privacy necessary, in order to keep his secrets from the public.

Jack went to the door and opened it.

Upon the threshold stood a dark-featured man, with jet eyes and clean shaved, his short, graceful figure clad in elegant clothing and a high, silk hat, tilted rakishly on one side, upon his raven hair.

He bowed politely to the boy, smiled, disclosing a white set of teeth, and said, in evenly modulated tones:

"Have I the honor of addressing Mr. Jack Wright?"

"That is my name, sir," replied the boy, nodding.

"Ah! happy to know you. Here is my card; permit me to introduce myself."

He handed an engraved bristol-board to the boy, who saw the name, "Oliver Rockwell," printed upon it in the most delicate script.

"For what purpose did you call on me?" queried Jack, glancing at his caller.

"Having heard that you are an inventor of vehicles that are adapted to withstanding firearms and travel by electric power, I have come up from New York to try and purchase one of you."

Jack smiled and shook his head.

"Then your errand is utterly fruitless," said he, "for none of my inventions are for sale. Besides, it costs me over \$50,000 to build the least expensive of them, so, you see, that fact alone might make any man hesitate to invest in such a luxury."

"Do not mistake my intention," coolly replied Oliver Rockwell. "I do not want the machine for a mere toy; besides, I am perfectly willing to spend as much money as you mentioned to get possession of such a contrivance."

Jack was struck by the man's persistence.

"Follow me into the house, sir," said he, "and I will talk the matter over with yeu, as you seem to have a potent motive in wishing to control one of my inventions, and we might come to a better understanding."

He led the stranger into his cozy library, which overlooked the garden, and although impressed by the stranger's conversation, he regarded his caller with the most intense aversion.

There was something about Rockwell that was very repulsive to the boy, despite the polished, gentlemanly bearing of the man.

As soon as they were seated at the library table, Jack crossed his legs and asked:

"If you don't want one of my inventions for amusement, why do you want it?"

"The reason is easily explained," replied Rockwell, laying down his hat and gloves on a chair. "For a number of years past I have been a resident in Victoria, Australia, prospecting for mines, and operating them. During one of those trips into the interior, it was my good fortune to become captured by the natives, who carried me away as their prisoner—"

"Your good fortune?" questioned Jack, elevating his eyebrows in surprise.

"Exactly so, as you will see by the sequel. The natives brought me through the bush by paths unknown to white men, and utterly impenetrable save by the guidance of one of the blacks. To get one to do so is utterly impossible, however. They brought me to their village within a deep ravine, where I found every evidence of barbaric splendor, for they dwelt in oddly constructed houses, made of a metal mined from the adjacent hills."

"And these people were savages, you say?" questioned Jack, interestedly.

"Very barbaric people, much like the Aztecs were of Mexico. They had a magnificent temple in the middle of their village, and I soon discovered within the edifice an enormous idol, which they worshipped. Its body was made of strangely carved gold, and the face had an enormous diamond imbedded in the forehead. This stone was fully as big around as a saucer, was rudely cut, but brilliantly polished, and must have weighed at least ten pounds."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Jack, uttering a suppressed whistle.

"This magnificent stone, white as the purest gem, bigger than any diamond yet found in the world, flashing with a scintillation as blinding as the midday sun, is worth a king's ransom, and its history is, of course, not known to me. Victoria is the diamond field of Australia, you know, and I have no doubt that in remote ages it was found by some native near where the idol was set up. At any rate, I eventually escaped from the tribe and made my way back to civilization with the resolve that if ever I could get the means to attack the natives and wrest that stone from them, my fortune was made. And that's why I want to purchase one of your engines."

Jack was amazed at the story.

The earnestness of Rockwell convinced him that the man was telling him the truth, but he firmly adhered to his unwillingness to sell one of his inventions, and so expressed himself to the stranger, disappointing him very much.

"Without such a machine or an army," said Rockwell, in despairing tones, "it will be impossible for me to realize my project. Now if you could only be induced to go into partnership with me in getting this gem by contributing the use of a machine and lending me your assistance and experience in operating it, we could easily get the stone."

"That would necessitate a long journey to Australia," said the boy; "besides all the risk to be run fighting the natives and all other perils that arise from such a trip. But since you talk in that strain, if you can show me good reason to believe in your story I might enter into such an arrangement with you."

"What! Would you?" delightedly cried Rockwell, his eyes flashing with an eager, feverish light, as he thrust his hand into his breast-pocket and pulled out a bundle of envelopes and papers. "Now that is encouraging, Mr. Wright, and I am sure I can prove the truth of all I say to you in a very short space of time."

"Proceed, sir," said the boy, quietly; "and if you do I will certainly go to Australia with you in quest of this fabulous diamond."

"Then read these papers, if you please," triumphantly said Rockwell, handing the boy a number of newspaper clippings he took from an envelope.

CHAPTER II.

SECRET OF THE DIAMOND.

Jack carefully read all the newspaper articles through, and found that they were the sworn statements of this man to

the authorities of Victoria, embodying the story he had just detailed.

Such evidence as this greatly convinced the young inventor that Rockwell's story must have some foundation in truth.

As soon as the boy finished reading the articles he laid them on the table, and meeting the eager, burning glance of the man who had been narrowly watching him all this while, he said:

"These accounts seem to be authentic."

"If you doubt them," replied Rockwell, quickly, "by corresponding with the authorities or newspapers, in which the items were published, they will assuredly corroborate the story in every particular. That is fair, isn't it?"

"Apparently. But I observed throughout your recital, as well as in these articles, that you have studiously refrained from mentioning whereabouts this native village was located," said Jack, shrewdly.

"Of course," assented the man with a significant look. "Why should I betray a secret worth a fortune? Had I done so in Australia, I have no doubt there would have been numerous expeditions formed at once to go after the diamond, and I'd get nothing in the end. But as far as you are concerned, since you express a willingness to undertake the journey in partnership with me, if I can convince you of the sincerity of my story, I have no objection to letting you into the secret."

"You can depend," said Jack, with dignity, "that your confidence shall be respected by me if I should fail to come to an agreement that would prove satisfactory to you. On the other hand, if you have any scruples about divulging your secret, do not tell me anything more. If, however, I should decide to go to Victoria with you, on this hunt, it would become necessary for you to give me all the particulars."

"Most decidedly," answered Rockwell, selecting a paper from among the rest. "And to show you now what faith I repose in you, I am going to show you a map I drew, by means of which we could go right to the very spot and put our hands on the golden idol with its diamond studded forehead. You must remember that when I was captured by the savages and was carried to their village, I kept my eyes wide open, and carefully observed the route they took. Then, when I lived among them, as a closely guarded slave, I had further opportunities of locating myself, and, when I made my escape, Mr. Wright, you may depend that my first observations were accurate, for remembering the route by which I was taken there, by following it, on the occasion of my flight, I found that I had made no mistake, as it led me out of the puzzling maze of the bush, to freedom and life once more. Here is the map I told you about, study it for yourself."

He opened out a piece of paper on the table, shoved it over to Jack, and the boy intently studied it through.

It was a well drawn map, and the travel line from Melbourne up through Wimmera District to Bullarook Desert was marked in red ink as far as the Murray river.

Here it paused and entered a ravine, running parallel with the water course, the latitude and longitude of which was plainly inscribed.

The region where the native village was indicated was one of the most isolated and unknown in Australia, and every detail of the map was indelibly impressed upon Jack's mind when he handed it back to Rockwell, with the remark:

"That is concise enough for any one to understand."

"Are you convinced yet?"

"Frankly, I must admit that I have great faith in your story."

"And you will make the venture?" eagerly asked the man.

"I cannot give you a decided answer at once," evasively replied the boy, "for I must have time to think it over, and

to confer with my two friends, Tim Topstay and Fritz Schneider."

"Very well. When shall I call for your answer?"

"Are you stopping in Wrightstown?"

"Yes. I have put up at the Sea Spider House."

"Then call to-morrow about this time and I'll tell you."

"Very good," said Rockwell, arising and putting on his hat and gloves.

He wished Jack good-morning, and the boy saw him to the door, when upon opening it, he observed several men standing on the front stoop.

"Oliver Rockwell," exclaimed the foremost man, upon seeing him emerging, "you are my prisoner!"

Had a bomb burst in front of the stranger he could not have been more startled, and he recoiled, uttering a suppressed cry.

At the same juncture the men on the stoop each whipped a revolver from their pockets and aimed them at the Australian, who had turned as pale as death and began to violently tremble.

"Stand and surrender!" sternly commanded the leader of the party. "If you attempt to stir a step we will shoot you down like a dog!"

The startled man came to a pause, with a feverish light in his burning eyes, and the muscles of his face twitching spasmodically.

Jack was never more surprised in all his life.

He stood looking on in wonderment, puzzling his brains to understand what such a tragic scene implied.

"What do you mean by molesting this man?" he demanded.

"Mean!" laughed the leader of the strangers. "Why—is it possibly you don't know who this scoundrel is, Mr. Wright?"

"I am at a loss to understand your allusions."

"Then I'll make it plain. I am an Australian officer of the law and these men local constables, and have come to America on the trail of this rascal, armed with a warrant for his arrest, on a charge of numerous crimes he has committed there, and I have tracked him to this house and determined to arrest him, bring him back to Australia and convict him for the British government."

Jack's amazement increased, and he glanced sharply at Rockwell, who stood betraying every sign of the most intense agitation.

Then the boy moved aside, made an impatient gesture, and said:

"Do your duty, sir."

"Come, Rockwell," said the officer; "hands out for the bracelets."

"You sha'n't put the darbies on me!" passionately exclaimed the accused.

"What! Going to fight in the face of all these weapons?"

"I won't go back alive!" hissed Rockwell, vehemently.

"How can you help yourself?"

"This way!"

And so saying the accused man raised a vial to his lips, and swallowing its contents he stiffened out, fell to the floor, and with a stentorous gasp and a convulsive struggle he lost all animation.

"Poison!" gasped Jack, gazing down at the stiffened figure.

"Suicide!" said the exasperated officer. "He has baffled me, gentlemen."

"Will I go for a doctor?" asked one of the officer's companions.

"Hold on!" said the Australian, dropping on his knees beside the body and carefully examining Rockwell all over.

"Well?" queried Jack, anxiously.

"He is dead!" was the startling reply.

Every one shuddered and looks of dismay crossed their

faces as they peered over at the fallen man's pallid skin, bulging and wide open eyes, and motionless bosom.

"What an unexpected tragedy," exclaimed Jack.

"It's provoking," said the Australian, arising in disgust. I've had all my trouble for nothing. Now I'll have to return home without him. He was a slippery customer. All I can do is to send for the dead-wagon and have him removed to the morgue. As soon as the coroner's inquest is over I'll leave."

He sent one of the constables after the vehicle to take the body away, and while awaiting its coming Jack asked:

"Of what crimes was this man charged, sir?"

"Why, he was the lieutenant of Captain Moonlight, the worst bushman in Australia, and he has committed more crimes than any of the outlaw gang to which he belonged."

"Do you know of him ever having discovered the location of a surpassing big diamond in Victoria?"

"Oh, yes, every one believed that story, which was current there last year, but it is not known that he ever got it."

"No; he just called on me with a view to enlisting me in a trip to recover it," said Jack, by way of explaining the outlaw's presence there, so as to avoid any disagreeable mystery about the matter.

Just then the dead-wagon came dashing up, the body was taken away, and excusing themselves for the annoyance they had to cause Jack, the officers went off.

The boy returned to his library deeply pondering over what had just occurred, as it made a lasting impression on his mind.

"I believe the outlaw's story about the diamond, now," muttered Jack, "and I have a great mind to go to Australia with my new engine and try to verify it. Let me see, I think I can remember how that map was drawn; it remained pictured so vividly upon my mind. I'll try to sketch it, as I may need it."

He had a wonderfully retentive memory, for, arming himself with a pencil and paper, he sat down and in the course of half an hour he reproduced Rockwell's drawing as perfectly as the original was.

This task had hardly been completed when he heard the door open with a bang that startled him, and glancing up hastily he saw Fritz come rushing in with a wild look upon his face.

"What is the matter?" demanded the boy, bounding to his feet.

"Shiminey Christmas! vot news I vhas got fer yer!" gasped the young Dutchman, dropping into a seat and panting hard from the exertion arising from the haste with which he came home.

"What is the matter now, for heaven's sake?" muttered Jack, in alarm.

CHAPTER III.

AN OFFER FROM ABROAD.

Fritz Schneider was a little fat Dutchman, with a florid face, light, fluffy hair, a round pudgy body and a tremendous stomach.

He was of an excitable nature, given to fighting, played an accordian and was accounted an expert electrician.

It was some time ere he recovered his breath, and, wiping the perspiration from his brow with a big red bandana handkerchief, he brushed his hair back with his hand and gasped:

"Vot yer tink habbened alretty?"

"I don't know. Nothing serious, I hope?" replied Jack, quickly.

"Yer know dot veller vot dook boison here?"

"Did you hear about it?" queried Jack, somewhat surprised.

"Vell, I should smiled mineselluf. Eferybody by der village vhas heard all apout dot, I tink so, und so I dit also, vonct."

"Well, what about him?" impatiently asked Jack.

"He don't vhas det."

"What! Alive yet?"

"Vell, I tink so."

"For heaven's sake, explain yourself clearer."

"Och, vaite. Dey vhas prung him by der morgue, you know—"

"Yes, yes!"

"Den dey sent for der goroners."

"Well, well?"

"But when dey vented back ter set on him he vhas gone."

"Gone?" blankly echoed Jack, with a perplexed look.

"Fer sure. He lef' a note pinned by der vall, und it set he vhas not such a fool like dey vhas imagined alretty to dooken boison. It vhas a trug vot make a feller look like det a leedle while. und when he vhas come to, vot he done but skib himselluf oudt."

"By jingo! So he fooled the officers and escaped, did he?"

"I tink so neider," asserted Fritz, with a nod of assent.

Jack's amazement knew no bounds, for he recollects that the man looked so much like a corpse as to deceive any one.

The boy thereupon explained to his friend all that transpired between Oliver Rockwell and himself, and by the time he finished Tim returned from the post-office with a foreign letter for the young inventor.

Topstay was a burly old fellow, with a wooden leg and a glass eye, and his weather-beaten face was ornamented with a fringe of grizzled whiskers.

He was attired in a semi-nautical suit, and was of a gruff, bluff nature, mainly characterized by the appalling lies he invented about his own exploits, the large quantity of plug tobacco he chewed, and his skill as a navigator, as he had been a sailor most of his life.

"Dash my toplights, but wot are this 'ere yarn as I heerd about you an' a lugger vot scuttled hisself?" he asked as he stumped in.

Jack repeated the story to him, arousing his most intense astonishment.

"I see you've brought me a letter?" said the boy, in conclusion.

"Aye, aye, lad, post-marked Australia, too!" said Tim, handing it over.

"How queer that everything to-day has some bearing on that country," remarked Jack, opening the official-looking envelope.

He read the letter through and uttered an exclamation.

"Who's der medder now?" asked Fritz, intently watching him.

"By Jove! here's another surprise!" said the boy.

"Then why in thunder don't yer read it?" queried Tim, curiously.

"I shall—just listen."

And Jack read the following letter:

"Melbourne, Australia, April 10, 18—.

"Mr. JACK WRIGHT—It has come to the knowledge of this department that a certain noted bushman, named Oliver Rockwell, who formerly was a member of Captain Moonlight's infamous gang, having discovered the location of a valuable diamond here in Victoria, anticipates calling on you, with a view of impressing you into an effort to get it."

"This government is well aware that your inventions are admirably adapted to traveling through the Australian bush,

and capable of penetrating into regions where horsemen and infantry would find it almost impossible to travel.

"It is my duty to warn you against this criminal, for any one caught associated with him in this country would be liable to arrest as his accomplice, and dealt with accordingly."

"On the other hand, I wish to personally make you an offer on behalf of the government to employ your services, and that of one of your peculiar engines, to track down and exterminate Captain Moonlight's band of outlaws who are terrorizing the surrounding country."

"For some time past this rascal, who, with his men, are all escaped convicts, were banished here by the British government, have been making the most daring and atrocious depredations upon colonies, travelers and farmers, robbing, pillaging and plundering everything and everybody that offers a likely inducement to them."

"Our police and troops are unable to cope with the outlaws, who are adept bushmen, and always escape attacks by taking to the almost impenetrable thickets, with the secret paths of which they are so familiar as to continually defy pursuit and apprehension."

"There is a standing offer of 5,000 pounds sterling as a reward to any one who shall secure the arrest and conviction of this lawless gang, and I take pleasure in stating that this sum would be doubled by voluntary subscription to remunerate you if I can prevail upon you to win the prize, and thus favor us."

"Hoping you will accept this offer, I remain sincerely,
"RALPH ARROWSMITH, Governor."

Every one was surprised at the contents of the letter.

"What do you think of it, boys?" asked Jack, after a pause.

"I wouldn't mind a-goin'," replied Tim, taking a chew of tobacco.

"Five thousand pounds vhas \$25,000, vhasn'd id?" queried Fritz.

"Yes; and we would also have an opportunity of securing Rockwell's big diamond," replied Jack, "for I have a copy of his map by which we can go to the exact spot where it is located."

"I reckon as thar's inducemints enough fer us," commented the old sailor, "an' I'm fer goin'."

"So I tink also," added Fritz, vehemently. "Vot's der goot of dot Dempest engine wot yer vhas yust invended if ve don'd vhas make use of id?"

"She would be splendidly adapted to traveling in the land of the kangaroo," said Jack, "for with her dangerous knife blades she could plough a way through the bush as easily as a ship's stem cuts through the brine. Besides, we could enjoy no end of exciting adventures in Australia, and I am getting rusty from inactivity."

"Then we goes?" queried Tim.

"Of course we will," answered Fritz.

"That settles it, then," said Jack.

"When do we get under weigh?"

"One week from to-day."

"Den ve got ter vork makin' retty to-morrow."

With this understanding our friends separated.

Jack wrote a letter of acceptance of the Australian governor's offer that night, and his two friends went out into the shop and began to select a list of articles necessary for such a trip as they contemplated.

When the boy finished the letter he laid it on the library table and went up to his room to retire.

He had hardly disappeared from the apartment when a ~~blue~~ red monkey came hopping into the library from the ~~outer~~-room.

Its name was Whiskers, and it was a mischievous little

rascal found by Tim in Africa during a trip he had made there with Jack.

He peered around with sharp, twinkling eyes, and then sprang on the table, and picked up the letter Jack had written, fumbled with it a while, and then deliberately tore it in two.

In the midst of his rascality a large, green parrot flew down from its perch on top of the open door, and landing on the monkey's head it dug its sharp talons in Whiskers' scalp, and the monkey uttered a shrill howl and sprang to the floor.

The bird belonged to Fritz, and was called Bismarck.

He had captured it at the same time and place where Tim secured the monkey, and while the parrot was an excellent talker, the most intense hatred existed between it and the monkey, which invariably found vent in the most furious pitched battles between them.

The moment they landed upon the floor a violent scuffle began, the monkey chattering, and the parrot screaming at the top of its voice:

"Murder! Fire! Police!"

Attracted by the tumult Tim and Fritz rushed in from the shop, and Jack came hurrying downstairs again, whereupon hostilities ceased as if by magic, and the mischievous combatants fled.

"Donner vetter!" growled Fritz. "I tort some vun vhas gettin' killed alretty."

"It was only a scrap between Bismarck and Whiskers," laughed Jack.

"Keel haul me, ef we ain't been fooled!" said Tim. "It took all ther wind out o' my sails. "I 'member onct when I was aboard o' ther ole frigate Wabash—"

"Shestnuts!" interposed Fritz in disgust. "Stop yer lyin', Dim!"

"I wuz in ther watch below," continued the old sailor, glaring balefully at the Dutch boy with his solitary optic, "when we heered a terrible row on deck, an' went up ther companion-way at a jump. When we reached her deck, expectin' ter find it a-swarmin' wi' rebels, wot d'yer think we saw?"

"Nothing," said Jack, impatiently.

"Guess again."

"Rats," ventured Fritz.

"Yer both wrong," chuckled Tim. "It wuz ther enemy."

Jack and Fritz turned away in disgust at the way Tim fooled them.

"I sailed right inter them, onscrewed my wooden leg, an' hoppin' aroun', I struck out right an' lef'," continued Tim. "Down went twenty on 'em afore by blows, an' then I ran up forrad ter man a gun, ter sweep ther deck—"

"Ran up forward with one leg, and your wooden peg in your hand?" asked Jack.

"Oh, don't be so pertickler about facts!" growled Tim, turning red at getting caught.

At that moment there came a cry from Fritz, and he pointed at the window.

Startled, Jack and Tim glanced around to ascertain the cause of his alarm.

Standing out on the piazza, with his pale face pressed against the window-pane peering in, stood Oliver Rockwell, the escaped outlaw.

CHAPTER IV.

DEPARTURE TO AUSTRALIA.

The trio were intensely startled at seeing the face of the fugitive there, and stood glaring at it in mute astonishment.

For several moments the silence remained unbroken.

Then the face suddenly disappeared.

Its going aroused the three friends from their stupor.

With one accord they rushed to the window and Jack flung up the sash, when they dashed out on the piazza.

But look where they would they could see no signs of Rockwell, and they finally returned to the library.

Neither Tim nor Fritz knew who the man was until Jack told them, and they had gained such a good look at him, that if they met him again in the future they were bound to recognize him.

Discussing the reason for Rockwell's disappearance, they could not form any motive for such an action.

To say the least, it was a very hazardous thing for him to do, considering that the police were on his trail.

Jack then discovered his torn letter, and reproaching the monkey, he flung the pieces out the window, and they all retired to bed.

Now it so happened that the fugitive was hidden under the piazza, and when Jack tossed the torn letter out, the pieces fell close to where he was crouching.

He picked them up, and ultimately putting the pieces together he read what Jack's intentions were for the future in Australia.

On the following morning the boy was up early with his friends, and after breakfast they repaired to the workshop.

"Before we dissect the Tempest and pack it for shipment," said the boy, "why not try the engine and find out if she is up to all my expectations of her? What do you say to that?"

"Nuthin' would suit me better," replied Tim, boarding the machine.

"I vhas made all der gonnections bedween dose batteries und der machineries," said Fritz, "und nodings remains vot I must do yet alretty, but ter put dose lefers in conchunksion mit der insulated vires."

"Then fix the joints," said Jack, "and we'll take a dash over the country, as I am wild with impatience to see how she works."

The Dutch boy complied.

As soon as everything was in readiness they boarded the engine, and Jack passed into the pilot-house and grasped the wheel, while Fritz made an examination of the accumulator jars, and Tim filled the automatic lubricators with oil.

The doors were opened by one of the young inventor's workmen, and Jack seized one of the levers, turned it, and putting the batteries in operation on the machinery, it began to work, the wheel revolved, and the engine ran out to the street.

She steered by the pivoted front small wheels very easily, and as she shot along through the streets toward the country, the few early risers who were out viewed her with the greatest interest.

Along she rolled, with blue electric sparks glinting at the wheels and driving-rods, the rubber-cushioned bearings drowning all undue noises, until she finally left Wrightstown behind her.

When they got out on the country road Jack steered her to the left over the wide, bushy fields, and as the keen edges of the steel cow-catcher struck the bushes it gashed through them like a mowing machine, cutting a clear path for the engine to follow.

On she swept without a halt at the densest and stoniest bushes, until she approached a grove of saplings.

The boy did not turn her aside an inch, but sent her plowing straight toward the young trees at an increased speed.

With a bang she struck them a terrific shock, and away they flew in showers to the right and left, as if they were mere whisps of straw.

The force of the Tempest's onslaught was like a battering-ram, and she tore through the grove as easily as she went

through the bushes, save that as there was more resistance in this case, a greater amount of power was required to drive her ahead.

"If dot vhas a brick valls in front ouf her she vould go troo id," laughed Fritz, as he critically watched the performance of the Tempest.

"Of course, there was some shock while driving her," said Jack as she ran from the grove over a rocky section, and he turned a lever which elevated the scythes at the wheel-hubs and the blades of the steel cow-catcher. "But she is so powerfully built that she would almost cut her way through a grove of young trees!"

Just then Tim came in and passing through the door he went out on the forward deck, where he stood clutching one of the three upright posts and squinted ahead.

He had barely stationed himself there when there sounded a distant pounding of hoofs as they came to another road, and they saw a terrified team of horses, hitched to a buggy, running away.

Upon the road lay the senseless figure of a gentleman who had been flung from the vehicle, while in the carriage crouched a frightened young girl, screaming at the top of her voice.

"A runaway!" gasped Jack, turning the engine into the road.

"Heave away, my lad, an' b'ar down arter 'em!" yelled Tim, excitedly.

"Ach, Gott!" groaned Fritz, his watery blue eyes bulging, "if dem peasts don't vhas been shtopped vonct dey vill go ofer in dot ditches und der woman vill got killed alretty."

"I'll save her if the Tempest can overhaul the horses!" cried Jack.

He turned the lever further and increased the speed of the engine, which now went flying ahead like a veritable locomotive.

The runaway team was a quarter of a mile in advance of the Tempest, their reins dangling on the ground, some of their harness broken, and they were driving their hoofs at the buggy, fast splintering it to pieces about the dashboard, while the way they pulled it along was rocking it from side to side.

It looked as if it might capsize at any moment and fling the frightened girl to the ground and kill or maim her.

Faster than the horses flew the Tempest, and Jack muttered:

"If I were to run alongside of them it would startle the beasts and cause them to spring off to one side, when a fatal accident to the young lady might result from it."

"Den vot yer vhas goin' ter do apoud id?" asked Fritz, excitedly.

"Run up behind the carriage, get in, and trust to luck to stop the horses with my hands! Here—take the wheel, and when we get up behind the buggy, regulate the speed to accommodate that of the horses."

On went the engine at breakneck speed.

She overhauled the runaways rapidly.

Jack passed out on the forward deck beside Tim, and as the engine swept up behind the carriage the boy crept out on the cow-catcher till he got close to the back of the carriage.

With one agile spring he landed on the down-turned top of the buggy, alongside of the girl, who was clutching the sides.

"Save me!" she moaned.

"Courage!" panted the boy. "I'll stop them."

"God help you!"

"Have no fear for me!"

And so saying he went boldly over the dashboard, got down on the swaying pole, and seizing the back-straps of the harness, he rapidly crept out midway to the horses' heads.

There he flung himself astride of the near horse, and grasping the two cheek reins he jerked them in and yelled sharply.

"Whoa! Whoa there, boys!"

Up went the horses' heads high in the air.

They slackened their mad, onward flight and began to rear and plunge, but despite everything they did the plucky boy soon brought the quivering, foam-flecked beasts to a standstill!

As soon as he had them under control he dismounted and repaired the broken harness as well as he could, seized the reins and got into the buggy beside the girl.

The Tempest had come to a pause not far distant.

"Follow after me, Fritz!" he shouted to the Dutch boy.

Then he took out the whip and said to the terrified girl: "The danger is all over, miss—you need not be alarmed."

"Oh, let me get out!" pleaded the girl.

"No, the team is subdued."

"Where is my poor father?"

"Lying stunned up the road."

"I must get back to him."

"Yes—I am going to drive you there now."

Jack gave the team a cut with the whip, and showing them that he had them well in hand he drove back to the senseless man, who by this time was rapidly reviving.

His clothes were torn and he was covered with dust.

But when he came to and saw his daughter and team saved, his gratitude to Jack knew no bounds.

He thanked the boy, over and over, told how the horses had become frightened by a sportman's gun, and getting into the half-ruined carriage he drove back homeward.

Jack lifted his hat to them, returned to the Tempest and started her for home, very well satisfied with her performance.

Here she was taken apart and packed up, with a number of things needful in such a journey as the boy expected to make in her, and their preparations for departure continued for a week longer.

As soon as everything was in readiness, our friends took the monkey and the parrot, boarded a train and went to San Francisco.

From there a steamer was taken for Australia, and after an uneventful voyage they arrived at Melbourne with their freight.

The three friends then called upon the governor and had a long talk with him, after which, in the course of a week's time the portable Tempest was adjusted and all their traps stowed away inside of her.

The machine was then secretly started off in the night, and leaving the city far behind our friends found themselves launched on their perilous trip at last.

CHAPTER V.

THE BUSHMAN.

"Stop that engine, on your life, stranger, or you will perish!"

It was an hour after Jack and his friends left Melbourne, when this stern command rang out in the road ahead of them.

The night was very dark, as storm clouds were obscuring the sky, and the young inventor could not see distinctly who it was that spoke, although he faintly made out a figure in the road ahead of the Tempest.

He reached up, and, turning a lever, cut off the electricity and put the brakes on, after which he seized a rod hanging from the ceiling, gave it a pull, and the searchlight flashed out a mile ahead on the road, while all the incandescent lights inside the engine simultaneously burst forth into a brilliant glow, illuminating the interior of the Tempest.

In the dazzling glare of the searchlight stood a huge, white horse, and a tride its back sat a gigantic man, attired in rough clothing and a slouched hat, his lip adorned by a

curling black mustache, and his dark eyes overshadowed by heavy, frowning brows.

He held a brace of large navy revolvers in his hand, pointed squarely at the young inventor, and, as the boy glanced further along the road, he saw a band of at least fifty horsemen, with black, half-masks on the upper part of their faces.

They were drawn up in even file in back of the giant, and every one of them had a rifle to his shoulder and beads drawn upon the young inventor.

Startled by such an unexpected scene, the boy remained speechless for a moment, wondering what was coming next.

As soon as Jack recovered, he realized that the men in front of him were outlaws, for a description of Captain Moonlight, the bushman, had been given him, and it tallied with the giant on the white horse.

Just then Tim and Fritz came into the pilot-house.

"Vot's der drubbles?" queried the Dutch boy.

"Bushmen!" replied Jack.

"Wot! Already?" questioned Tim, in amazement, as he peered out.

"You can see for yourself," replied Jack.

The sailor and Dutch boy were justly amazed, as they did not expect to encounter the thieves so close to the city.

Addressing the man on the white horse Jack then asked: "What do you mean by stopping us in this manner, sir?"

"I'll tell you," replied the bushman. "My agents in Melbourne have apprised me that your name is Jack Wright. I was told you was sent for to the United States, by the Governor and I know that your object is to exterminate my band."

"Then you acknowledge that you are Captain Moonlight?"

"I do not deny it. Moreover, since you have come to Australia to exterminate me, I have come to meet you half way. I am here to be exterminated. But you, of course, can see that it is impossible for you to do any harm. I, therefore, warn you to turn back before I reverse the tables. Give the Governor my regards, and tell him I still defy his utmost powers to wipe my band out."

Jack realized that he had a bold, reckless and powerful rascal to deal with, whose agents kept him apprised of every move made by the government to attack him.

But the boy was determined to show the outlaw that he meant business, and was not to be intimidated in the least.

He turned a lever and the screens slid over the windows, intervening a bullet-proof barrier between Captain Moonlight and himself.

"Your warning," said the boy, "is useless. I don't intend to turn back until I have put an end to you and your gang!"

"If you do not instantly depart I'll order my men to fire on you!"

"Try it, and you'll see what the result will be!"

A furious exclamation pealed from the bushman's lips, for he did not expect any such defiance as this.

Turning in the saddle he raised his hand.

It was a signal to his men to fire, and they let a volley drive at the engine, simultaneously.

There came a clatter like hailstones on a window-pane, as the bullets hit the Tempest's wire cage, but the tough aluminum wire resisted the bullets like an ironclad and they fell harmless to the ground.

Hardly had the reports died away when Jack turned the lever of the engine, when the Tempest suddenly started ahead with a sudden rush, its terrible knife blades aimed straight at the horses' legs.

A cry of consternation pealed from Captain Moonlight's lips when he saw that none of Jack's party were injured, and that the Tempest was dashing straight toward him.

At the same juncture his steed sprang aside, frightened at the engine, and thus saving its life.

"Arin and fire!" exclaimed Jack.

Tim and Fritz seized their rifles from the racks on the wall and each manned a loophole, covering the bushmen.

On dashed the engine straight into the midst of the masked horsemen, and before they could scatter the cow-catcher and the wheel blades were ripping through their ranks.

As the cruel blades struck the animals they bestrode, a number of them were mown down, throwing their riders, and a scene of the most terrific confusion ensued, in the midst of which Tim and Fritz opened fire on the thieves.

They used pneumatic rifles and the projectiles discharged from them exploded when they hit their marks.

The bushmen scattered.

Some of them returned the fire without doing any harm, while many of their own number fell, mortally wounded.

The Tempest swept straight through their ranks, went beyond them and finally ran around in a circle.

Back she rushed, pell-mell, her crew ready and eager to give battle to the bushmen, but when she got back to the spot where Jack had left his enemies, they had all disappeared.

Only a few dead horses remained upon the scene.

"Gone!" exclaimed Jack as he swept the glaring searchlight around. "We've annihilated them already!"

"Vot's become ouf dem?" asked Fritz.

"Must ha' taken ter ther bush!" commented Tim.

Jack critically examined the surrounding scrub with the searchlight, and saw that the vegetation partook of a tropical character.

There were on one side forests of towering palms and gum trees, the surface of the ground beneath clothed with dense, impervious underwood composed of dwarf trees, shrubs and tree-ferns, festooned with creepers and parasite plants.

These dense forests, through which travelers cannot cut their way more than a mile or two a day, were interspersed with open glades or meadow reaches, called apple-tree flats.

On the other side was a dense thicket extending back to rocky, round-backed ranges of hills, containing detached belts of bunya-bunya pines, twenty feet in circumference and one hundred feet high.

The bushmen had disappeared in this thicket.

To pursue them there would have been the height of folly in such gloom, as they could easily evade our friends.

"We may as well give them up," said Jack. "We can't follow them and do anything in this darkness."

"They must ha' carried away their wounded messmates, too," said Tim.

"By Shiminey!" said Fritz, who had been looking up the road. "See dere!"

Captain Moonlight had come dashing out of the thicket on his fiery white horse, a hundred yards away, and yelling defiantly at them, he sent his mount flying along with clattering hoofs.

"A defiance!" said Jack. "I'll pursue him!"

"Och! How dot horses could run alretty!" gasped Fritz, admiringly.

Jack started the engine flying after the bushman, the searchlight streaming ahead with a blinding glare.

The outlaw kept an even distance between himself and the Tempest.

They proceeded in this manner for some time, when Tim suddenly held up his hand and exclaimed:

"Shiver me, lads, but I hears horses' hoofs astern of us!"

"See who it is," said Jack.

The old sailor went back in t store-room, and, peering out a rear window, he faintly distinguished a number of horsemen following in pursuit, at a respectful distance behind the engine.

They were the bushmen

Returning to the pilot-house Tim reported the fact to Jack.

"I see what they are up to now," said the boy, quietly.

"Captain Moonlight is evidently trying to lure us into a trap."

"Aye, aye, lad, that's werry evident," assented the old sailor.

"Vhy yer don't run him down vonet?" suggested Fritz.

"I'll try it," said Jack, and he increased the engine's speed.

Along dashed the Tempest, and she began to swiftly over-haul the bushman, when Jack fired a pistol shot after him.

Whether it injured him or not the boy never knew, for he just then steered his horse from the road and disappeared in the scrub, and they heard no explosion of the bullet.

The men in pursuit disappeared, too, like magic.

Jack slackened the speed of the Tempest and ran her on at a moderate rate, when to his surprise Captain Moonlight presently emerged from the bush again, some distance ahead.

He galloped along swiftly, and Jack's blood began to boil.

"He is a tantalizing wretch," he muttered, in exasperated tones, "and I'll run him down again and give him another shot."

Once more the Tempest was speeded and began to gain on the bushman, when he came to a fork in the road and swerved to the left. By the time the Tempest got around the bend he had vanished again, but a cry of horror pealed from Jack's lips as the searchlight, flashing on, showed him that they were rushing toward the edge of a cliff, at which the road he was on terminated.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RED LIGHT INN.

"Shut off the current and put on the brakes, Tim, or we'll go over the cliff!"

"Aye, lad! Hard aport yer hellum on yer life!"

Jack spun the wheel around with all his might, and the old sailor grasped the levers and turned them, while Fritz glared ahead at the yawning chasm toward which they were being whirled.

The edge of the cliff was half a mile off when it was first seen.

The speed at which the engine was going soon diminished the distance, however, and by the time action was taken to avert the danger they were within one hundred yards of it.

Tim shut off the current.

But the impetus given to the machine by its onward rush drove it ahead, and the old sailor was just about to put on the brakes when Jack twisted the small front wheels around.

The Tempest described a curve.

Off she went, crashing to the left among the scrubs, and up in the air flew showers of bushes and plants, as the knife blades gashed through them and cut away a path for the engine.

With a grating noise the blades clamped the driving-wheels and the Tempest came to a sudden pause.

She stood stock still in the bush, her electric lights shining out on all sides, and her crew all sighing with relief over their escape.

Nothing was seen of any of the bushmen.

Jack did not keep the engine there long, for after a brief, excited discussion of the situation, they ran her out on the road, returned to the fork and followed the other road.

It proved to be the regular beaten track of vehicles that went that way, and they continued on for half an hour until they came in sight of some crimson lights glimmering in a building ahead.

"There's the Red Light Inn now!" said Jack, pointing ahead.

"Cappen Moonlight's hang-out, eh?" queried Tim.

"So the Melbourne authorities apprised me."

"Und you vhas shtob dere?" queried Fritz.

"Yes, for to-night, so we can see what comes of it."

"But none o' them blasted lan' pirates is aboard a' thier inn."

"After their experience with us they will very likely go there."

A programme of procedure was hastily arranged, when Jack put on a suit of mail underneath the traveling suit he wore, and, having armed himself, he alighted.

Tim and Fritz remained aboard of the Tempest, and Jack watched them drive her into the thickets where she was hidden from sight, after which he strode away toward the inn.

It was an old, dilapidated building with a pump in front of it, a light in the dingy window of the barroom, and several lights in the small, old-fashioned windows under the gabled roof.

The boy walked up to the building, from which he heard loud and boisterous talk and laughter proceeding, and opening the door he passed into the saloon.

It was crowded with men, all of whom were drinking, smoking, laughing, talking and gambling at side tables.

Jack glanced swiftly around in surprise at seeing so many men there in such an isolated country place, and observed that every one of them were roughly clad, evil-looking men.

They peered hard at him, too, with looks of surprise, and there came a sudden lull in the laughter, clinking of glasses and talk.

Without seeming to pay much attention to the people in the room, Jack strode up to the bar, lit a cigar and ordered a glass of wine, in the meantime covertly observing how closely he was scrutinized.

He had become convinced at the first glance that every one of the inmates of the room were members of Captain Moonlight's band of thieves, for among other information given him at Melbourne, the boy was told that the noted outlaws had made a rendezvous of the Red Light Inn.

When the bartender served the boy he said, in pleasant tones, while nearly every one in the room listened:

"You seem to be a stranger in these parts, sir?"

"What leads you to infer so?" the boy quickly asked.

"Bless you, I know nearly every one in this district."

"And every one who comes this way from Melbourne?"

"No—not every one, but the regular passersby."

"But, you must remember, many people from the city may find occasion to come this way occasionally on business with whom you can't become acquainted, as they don't stop in here."

"Very true, sir. But any one in Australia hearing you speak would know at once that you were an American."

"Indeed! Perhaps you are right. At any rate, you are keenly observant. You must allow that others are, too. Myself for example. Inquisitive as well. I can't help remarking that you have extensive patronage here."

"That's because this tavern is the only one around here."

"Isn't it a little singular that all your customers are on such a fraternal standing with each other? It also strikes me as being remarkable that they all carry revolvers in their belts."

"Nothing strange in that. They are mostly all sheep raisers from the surrounding bush, and—"

But before the man could complete the explanation, there sounded the pounding of horses' hoofs out in front of the inn, and a moment afterward the door was flung open and Captain Moonlight and several of his men came in.

He saluted the men fraternally, and thus convinced Jack that they were some of his band of outlaws.

Then he strode up to the bar, when his glance fell on Jack, and he came to a sudden pause.

"Thunder!" he gasped. "Here's Jack Wright!"

Had a bomb burst among the inmates of the room they could not have been more startled than they were upon hearing this, as the expressions upon their faces attested.

"He recognizes me!" flashed across Jack's mind.

The boy was surprised at it, for he did not know that the outlaw had him pointed out by a spy, during his sojourn at Melbourne.

Still the young inventor did not flinch.

He was startled, but realized that if he were to give way to any alarm over the dangerous position in which he found himself he would stand a poor chance of defending himself against that crowd.

The boy instantly became as cool, collected and alert as it were possibly to be, and boldly facing the outlaw chief he said:

"You seem to be amazed at my presence here. And no wonder, since you just tried to lure me to my destruction. I was fortunate enough to thwart your infernal project, as you can plainly see."

"Well, you're a cool one!" exclaimed Captain Moonlight, with a frown. "But you've run yourself into a hornet's nest, boy."

"By that remark you signify that I am surrounded by your men, eh?"

"Exactly. Your object to annihilate me and my band is clearly understood. You have opened the ball by attacking us and fatally wounding a number of my followers. The consequence shall be your death."

"You do not hesitate at murder, then?"

"It is our policy to kill those who menace our lives and liberty."

As Captain Moonlight made this statement he motioned to his men in a manner they understood, and they all withdrew their revolvers and covered Jack with them.

A semi-circle of the weapons covered the undaunted boy.

He viewed them calmly, so calmly, indeed, that the outlaws who were threatening his life were astounded.

The boy's nerve caused many of them to think that Jack was a lunatic, for it did not seem possible that a sane person, no matter how reckless, would betray so little fear in the face of almost certain destruction.

Even Captain Moonlight was impressed by it.

So much so, indeed, that he hesitated to give the fatal order to fire upon the plucky Yankee boy and kill him in cold blood.

"Well," said Jack, smilingly, "why don't you fire?"

The bushmen cast querulous, doubtful glances at their leader, for had the boy betrayed excessive fear and excitement and made an effort to defend himself not one would have fluctuated over shooting him.

No reply was vouchsafed to the boy.

He thereupon drew his own brace of pistols.

"None of them are aiming for my head yet," he thought, as his keen glance swiftly swept around at the grim array of weapons.

The suit of mail he wore was so impervious that it would have almost resisted a cannon-ball, and the boy therefore had but little fear of the pistol shots he expected to penetrate it.

Producing his own weapons caused his enemies to start, for they saw now that he meant to return their shots.

"If you won't do anything," said Jack, "I'll start in!"

"Fire at him!" yelled Captain Moonlight, arousing himself.

Before the bushmen complied, Jack's weapons poured a rapid and deadly fire upon the bushmen.

The rapidity with which the boy shot at them was startling, for his magazine pistols each contained twenty shots.

He had no sooner begun the fusillade when they too fired, and a hail of bullets screamed toward him amid the reports of their pistols, and although a dozen bullets struck him about various parts of the body they did him no harm.

The bushmen imagined he was riddled with bullets, but to their alarm and astonishment, observed him still standing as

If unhurt with his back against the bar, continuing to pour in a deadly fire upon them.

And as it kept up, despite the fact that they saw that their bullets were hitting him, their surprise turned into absolute fear of the boy.

CHAPTER VII.

ATTACKED WITH BOOMERANGS.

Among the bushmen were many very ignorant men, who were firmly imbued with superstitious belief, and when they saw Jack withstanding their bullets with cool indifference, they at once began to imagine that there was something unnatural about the boy.

It never once occurred to them that his body was protected by a suit of armor, and they began to recoil, as much in fear of what they thought his miraculous power as they were to see him rapidly dropping several of their gang.

The fact that his pistols made no report, and that the bomb-like bullets did not burst till they hit their mark, struck them forcibly, and the appalling power of each ball he fired added to their terror.

Unable to stand it any longer, they rushed from the room, and, despite Captain Moonlight's protests, averred that Jack was not human, else the shots they fired would have made a sieve of his body.

Jack saw his advantage and followed them up.

Thus far not a ball had been aimed at his head, but a flying bullet grazing one of his unprotected hands, cut it.

He had just reached the door when he heard a furious noise among the men whom he had driven from the inn, and saw at a glance that Tim and Fritz occasioned it.

Having heard the shots they had armed themselves and came running to Jack's rescue, when they saw the gang, divined who they were and opened fire upon them.

With yells and curses the bushmen fled.

The darkness favored them.

Leaving several more of their number lying wounded upon the ground, they took to the adjacent hedges.

In a twinkling they all vanished.

Jack had won the fight.

He was soon joined by his friends, to whom he explained what had occurred, after which Tim returned to the Tempest.

Jack and Fritz then found that there were five of the bushmen so badly injured that they could not escape with the rest, many of whom had received less serious wounds.

They bound the raving wretches with shade cords taken from the store by the time Tim came along with the Tempest, and remained at the inn all night without seeing anything of their enemies, despite the watch they kept up.

With the dawn of day several men came along with a drove of sheep and a wagon, and Jack accosted them and found that they were bound for Melbourne.

They willingly consented to carry the prisoners to the city, and put them in the hands of the authorities for Jack, who inscribed a note and sent it to the Governor.

As soon as the shepherds set off, Fritz went back in the Tempest's kitchen, where there was a small stove for cooking, heated by electricity, at which he rapidly prepared a good breakfast.

When this was finished Jack started the engine along the road, and they followed it for some distance through a rocky defile.

The boy soon began to find that a great portion of the interior of the country was hopelessly barren and impassable, being in dry weather a hollow basin of sand.

In the wet season a vast, shallow inland sea is formed, alternately and rapidly swelled by tropical currents, then dried up by the sun.

The island surface is depressed in the centre, bounded by almost continuous ranges of hills and plateaux, and covered by immense open downs and grassy plains, wild forests, jungles of towering grass and dense thickets.

As they rode along, ground pigeons, grass paroquets, and quails rose up in thousands; from time to time flocks of emus thundered past, kangaroos bounded swiftly away and along the adjacent streams clouds of waterfowl arose skyward.

The wisdom of gaining fresh draughts of air from the huge ventilators on the roof may be inferred when it is stated that in that country the thermometers frequently arose to 130 degrees in the shade, and hot winds blow over the land from the sterile interior plains.

From information Jack received he learned that the haunts of the outlaws extended from Melbourne up into Wimmera.

It was, therefore, Jack's plan to press right on toward his destination in quest of bushmen he had agreed to exterminate.

Consequently he did not trouble himself about them now.

Steering the Tempest straight ahead the boy soon brought her into a forest, when he was suddenly startled by hearing a cry of distress in a man's tone of voice.

It came from among the trees off to the right.

The boy brought the engine to a pause.

"Did you hear that yell, Fritz?" he asked.

"Do yer tink I vhas got mud in mine ears?" queried the Dutch boy.

"There is some one in distress among those trees."

"Vhy don't he vhas come out, den?"

"I'm going in to find out—"

"Help! help!" yelled the distant voice, frantically interrupting him.

Jack grasped a rifle and sprang to the ground.

"Tim, take care of the Tempest!" he shouted.

"Hey!" roared Fritz. "Vait fer me, und I go mit yer vonct!"

The boy had dashed ahead, however, and left the Dutch boy to come toddling after him.

Hardly had Jack gone a dozen steps, though, when a black native sprang into the road from behind a tree.

He held a boomerang in his hand.

It was a curved stick of heavy wood.

The man wore a beard and had on a cloak of matting, his hair was adorned with a bunch of feathers and his bosom and back were scarred by rows of hideous scars.

By a dexterous fling the native shot the boomerang high in the air, in back of Jack, where it described a curve, and flying backward with unerring accuracy, it struck Jack a terrible blow on the back of the head.

He was knocked senseless.

A yell escaped the savage, and he made a dash for the prostrate boy, when a rifle crack pealed out in the woods and a ball laid the black a corpse.

Fritz was just about to fire.

A moment later the man who had been yelling for help came rushing out of the woods and shouted:

"Fly for your lives! The savages are pursuing!"

"Come dis vay!" roared Fritz, as he seized Jack, and dragging him over to the Tempest, was assisted in lifting him aboard by Tim.

The stranger, a white man, in a traveling suit, clambered aboard of the Tempest with his rifle, and dodged inside.

With a bang the doors were shut, just as a horde of native blacks dashed from the bushes and sent a volley of spears and boomerangs flying at the engine.

"Fire on them, friends!" panted the stranger. "If you don't they will batter this engine to pieces, sure!"

"Don'd yer believe dot," reassuringly said Fritz as he examined Jack's head to see if his skull was broken. "Dis machines vhas been able ter stand de oxblosions of a bowder kag."

"Is your friend hurt?"

"I reckon as they've broke his neck!" growled Tim, shooting a keen glance of his solitary eye at the bewhiskered individual who had saved the young inventor's life.

Just then a large party of the natives surrounded the engine, shouting furiously, and bombarding it with their missiles, when Tim and the stranger grasped their weapons and sprang to the loopholes, through which they began firing.

In the meantime Fritz revived Jack, but the boy remained very groggy and suffered from a most intense headache.

The young Dutchman put him to bed in one of the berths and joining Tim and the stranger he helped them to repulse the natives.

After a short, sharp fire, the blacks retreated.

They were completely demoralized.

"Wuz it you as we heerd a-hailin' fer help?" asked Tim of the stranger.

"Yes. I had a hard fight of it with them, and thought they would have gained the mastery of me when I managed to escape; and I was just in time to save your friend from capture."

"Aye, now, it wuz lucky as yer came jist when yer did!"

"What a peculiar machine this thing is!"

"Kinder," admitted Tim. "It's a overland engine, sir."

"Run by electricity, too, I see?"

"Aye, aye!"

"And these wire cages are impervious?"

"Bullet proof."

"What are you doing here with it?"

"A-shapin' our course fer ther Murray River."

"Indeed! That's a long distance from here."

"So I reckon."

"I presume you are familiar with the way?"

"Lor' no! Ain't never been in these parts afore, sir."

"How would you like to have me go as a guide?"

"Waal, it's kind o' ye, lad, but wait till I ax Jack."

The boy had fallen asleep, however, so they did not disturb him.

They remained where they were until nightfall, by which time nothing more was seen of the natives, and Jack awakened.

He came out and was told what the stranger had done for him, but just as he was about to thank him a singular event occurred.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE EXPOSURE.

The stranger, turning around to face Jack, did not observe a chair in front of him and tripped over it.

Ere he could recover his balance he fell to the floor with a crash and to every one's amazement his whiskers fell off.

They were evidently false appendages.

The three friends gazed at the man in surprise.

And this feeling was increased ten-fold when they saw who he was.

"Oliver Rockwell!" exclaimed Jack.

"Holy himiney!" gasped Fritz.

"Dash me!" was Tim's amazed cry.

The stranger scrambled to his feet.

"Exposed!" he remarked, ruefully.

"In heaven's name how came you here?" asked Jack.

For a moment the fugitive hesitated about explaining, but

as there was a plan arranged in his mind he thought it best to speak.

"I came here ahead of you from Wrightstown," said he.

"And this disguise?"

"Was assumed so I could pass through Melbourne undetected. You, of course, heard how I escaped the detective at Wrightstown?"

"Yes, I know all about it."

"Then I won't repeat the story. I hid on your premises and escaped by train the next day to Chicago, from whence I came on here."

"And your object now?"

"I am on my way to try and recover the big diamond." Jack's face lengthened.

By right of discovery this man owned the gem if they recovered it, and as he was going after it, to try and supersede him would be equal to highway robbery.

"That settles it!" said Jack. "I am out of the hunt now."

"I know all your plans," said Rockwell, demurely.

"You do?"

"Do you remember the torn letter you flung out in your yard?"

"Yes. It explained all my intentions to the Governor of Victoria."

"Well, I got the letter, read it, and know all your plans."

"Then you are aware that we intended going for the diamond?"

"Of course I am. It was mean of you to forestall me."

"I did it because I thought you'd never go for the stone."

"Well, let's keep up the terms of partnership I proposed to you."

"By no means. Since then I've learned what your true character is, and I have no ambition to associate myself with a criminal," said Jack, in haughty, disdainful tones.

Rockwell's cheeks flushed with mortification.

He did not like this stinging allusion to his depravity.

"If I have done wrong," he exclaimed vehemently, "I am not a common ruffian, nor an ill-bred loafer. I was brought up and educated to become a gentleman!"

"You're worse than a common, ignorant man," insisted Jack. "Such a person is not cultivated to thoroughly appreciate the depth there is to infamy. On the other hand, an educated scoundrel knows very well what depravity there is in crime. The ignorant man's brutality can therefore be partly overlooked, but the educated man's, never!"

Rockwell made an impatient gesture.

"Drop preaching, you beat me!" he exclaimed.

"Well, I've only told you the truth!" said Jack, coldly.

"Remember, I saved your life."

"I am grateful to you for it."

"Then repay me by letting me go with you in this engine to get the diamond, will you, Wright?" he asked. "Remember, I am familiar with this country and would be a valuable man to have along, more especially in helping you to run down the gang of bushmen under Captain Moonlight, whom you are after."

This argument struck Jack forcibly.

He turned to Tim and Fritz to arbitrate the matter.

"I'll do as my friends say," he remarked, reluctantly.

"We can dook him along und arrest him when ve come back," said Fritz.

"Tain't no use a-denyn' as he kin navigate us better'n any one else," said Tim.

"Well, what do you say, shall we go or not?" the boy asked.

"I'm agreeable, my lad."

"Und I tink so neider."

"Rockwell, you can go under certain conditions."

"Name them," eagerly answered the man, his eyes snapping

"You must promise no treachery."

"I do."

"Aid us in trouble and help capture the bushmen."

"I will."

"And leave us on our return."

"Certainly."

"Swear it."

"I swear!"

Jack was satisfied that the man spoke sincerely, and driving the engine through the woods, they saw several of the blacks hiding behind the bushes and trees, watching them go by.

But they did not attack the Tempest again.

They had seen how useless it was to do so, and yet ached from the shots our friends had given them at the first assault.

Night settled down upon the scene.

The Tempest had left the main road now, under the direction of Oliver Rockwell, and went rolling across the grassy downs with the moon and stars shining down from the clear sky, and myriads of bats filled the soft, balmy air.

The watch was divided, Jack and Rockwell in the first and Tim and Fritz in the second, as the young inventor was suspicious of the ex-bushman and wanted to keep an eye on him constantly.

Rockwell proved to be of a morose, quiet, deep-thinking disposition, never vouchsafing much information unless some one addressed him.

He evidently was very familiar with the country they were traversing, for in answer to Jack's questions, when Tim and Fritz turned in he gave the boy considerable useful information about the country, inhabitants, birds, beasts and fishes.

At midnight the engine was brought to a pause in the midst of a dried-up prairie, and Tim and Fritz assumed watch.

They sat in the pilot-house, the Dutch boy smoking his pipe and the old sailor chewing plug tobacco, and as the lonesome hours passed by the old sailor began to doze, and finally fell asleep.

Fritz watched him quietly out of the corner of his eye until he began to snore, and then arose with a mischievous look on his face.

He softly tiptoed his way across the room to where the electric wires came up from the batteries, detached one from a binding post, and twisted it around Tim's wrist.

Then he unstrapped the old sailor's wooden leg and hid it.

Snoring like a buzz-saw, Tim slept peacefully, in blissful ignorance of the plot against his happiness.

Beside the old sailor, Whiskers, the monkey, lay coiled in a heap, fast asleep, and the Dutch boy brought a second wire from Tim's wrist to the metal collar around the monkey's neck.

Then he turned one of the levers and reversed it.

An electric current flashed through the wire.

With a start Tim opened his eye and sat bolt upright, while the monkey uttered a dismal howl and leaped up in the air.

The ancient mariner was only partially awakened by the slight shock, upon observing which Fritz pulled the lever again.

This time Tim flew up in the air.

"Fire an' brimstone!" he roared.

The second current dashed into Whiskers just as he landed on the floor, and away he shot skyward again, with a yell like a steam whistle.

Alternately making and breaking the current, Fritz started the old sailor and the monkey hopping up and down, and yelling as if mad.

"Avast!" roared Tim. "Wot are ye a-doin' thar, yer lubber?"

"Wow! Whee!" echoed Whiskers, striking out wildly with his hairy legs.

"Balanze gorners!" chuckled Fritz, with a broad grin. "Och, all aroundt han's. Backwards und forwets! Sashay bardners. Least und righd. Ladies by der middle!"

"Haul to!" yelled Tim, wildly, dancing on one leg. "Whar's my pin? Gimme a ax an' I'll pulverize yer foretop! Hey, stop that current, Fritz, or—oh—ow!"

"Whee! Whee! Yit!" screamed Whiskers, his eyes bulging, and all the hair on his body standing on end.

Fritz laughed till tears rolled down his cheeks at their antics, for the old sailor could hardly stand up on one leg without his artificial member, and the monkey kept steadily hopping up and down, each leap putting an extra kink in its tail and sending its head nearer the ceiling.

"Luff up!" bellowed Tim, pulling a horrible face. "What are ye a-doin' this fer?"

"I vant ter voke yer avakes," explained Fritz between his side-splitting peals of laughter. "Ach Gott! Go id, Dim! Shump, yer oldt son-of-a-sea-gooks, und puddy soon yer bead dot mongeys, und go troo dot ceilings alretty."

"Blast yer timbers, I'll—oh! Ouch! Help—murder!" roared Tim as shock after shock flew threw him, and he eapered around on one leg.

Their outcries brought Jack and Rockwell flying in, when Fritz stopped, and the old sailor made a flying hop to catch him.

Before he could reach the dodging Fritz, however, the Duteh boy suddenly pointed out the window and gasped:

"Mein Gott! Looker dot!"

Every one looked in the direction indicated, and cries of alarm pealed from their lips as they saw a distant, sullen glare come sweeping rapidly toward them with the rising wind.

"The prairie is afire!" gasped Jack. "The wind is sweeping the flames this way. If we remain here five minutes more, boys, we will get roasted to death."

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRAIRIE FIRE.

Far away in the southwest there shone a vivid glow along the horizon, above which arose vast clouds of smoke, amid which glittered millions of flying sparks and embers.

It was rushing rapidly toward the Tempest on the wind, and as it drew nearer each moment the glow merged into shooting flames that licked up skyward in large volumes.

Rushing on ahead of the sweeping conflagration were herds of thousands of beasts, which at first looked like a mere dark speck and afterwards merged into their own proportions.

On came the fiery tongues like a race-horse, the line of its advance extending miles wide, and the tongues reaching high up to the clouds, for the prairie grass was so long that a boy of ordinary size would have been buried in it.

Jack did not waste any time allowing the fire to get nearer to them, but sprang to the wheel and turned the starting lever.

"It's a race for life!" he exclaimed, as the Tempest moved ahead.

"Lord save us, lad, ha' we got ter run afore ther flames?" queried Tim.

"There's no other way," said Rockwell, decisively, "unless —"

"Vot?" queried Fritz, as he paused.

"Unless we start a fire ahead to block it."

"Let that go as a last resort," said Jack, "for we would have to seek protection over the burnt track, and the heat it would leave behind in the ground would be frightful for us to stand over."

"Dont dere vhas a rifers somewhere ahet?" asked Fritz, as the engine gathered speed and went rushing off before the fire.

"None near at this season of the year," responded Rockwell, "for the drought has been on. Look yonder and you'll see its effect."

He pointed off to the right, at what might once have been the bed of a stream which was now dried up.

It now consisted of a chain of pools, linked together by tiny shallow streams of sluggish water.

Fritz gave Tim his wooden leg, and the old sailor put it on again.

Jack glanced up at one of the registers and saw the Tempest was plunging ahead at the rate of forty miles an hour.

Flashing sparks of electricity were snapping at all her joints with a blue color, and the keen knife blades and cow-catcher were hissing like escaping steam as they gashed through the tall grass, and sent it flying in all directions.

"Ther flames are a-gainin'!" exclaimed Tim, glancing back.

"Then I'll drive her faster," said Jack, moving the lever further.

"The indicator marks fifty miles an hour now," commented Rockwell, with a sullen look, as he peered up at it.

"S'pose dat gow-catchers vhas run a bunk mit a rocks?" said Fritz, in a scared whisper. "Ve sure vhas proke der Dembest's nose alretty."

"Have to run chances," said Jack.

"This prairie is almost devoid of out-cropping rocks," exclaimed Rockwell.

Despite his assurance they all felt anxious.

The searchlight streamed out ahead, but it could not penetrate the long, wavy grass, and going at such a high rate of speed, if there were any obstructions in the way, they would rush upon them so swiftly that the shock would come ere they could prevent it.

It kept them in a state of suspense.

Still the boy made the engine plunge ahead, rocking and rolling like a ship at sea over the undulating ground.

Mile after mile was thus spun over, the engine keeping its lead steadily, if not gaining slightly on their appalling pursuer.

It revived the courage of the fugitives.

"We may run away from it yet," said Jack.

"I dole you so," said Fritz, wisely, although he had done nothing of the kind.

"There is another chance for us," said Rockwell, presently.

"Wot's that?" was the old sailor's eager question.

"This prairie terminates in a sandy desert without any kind of vegetation, and if we can reach it before the fire we are safe."

"Do you know how far away it is?" asked Jack, anxiously.

"Judging from where we are, I might say ten miles off yet."

"Then in a quarter of an hour we may reach it?"

"Hurroar!" cheered Tim. "Can't ye put on more speed, lad?"

"Yes—ten miles an hour more."

"Dot vill safe fife minutes for us!" said Fritz.

"Then here she goes," said Jack, turning the lever to its fullest extent.

The engine now went plowing its way through the tall grass like a lightning express train, the force of her advance causing the knife blades to change their buzz into a shrill whistle, while a continuous streak of blue flame flashed from the joints.

A tremendous draught was raised.

Grass and bushes flew up in the air in an unbroken stream on either side of the Tempest now as she cut in from the fire that was arching ahead in the sky in a great crimson canopy.

The clouds of smoke that rolled up from the conflagration

were so dense that the stars were obscured when the upper stratas of air caught them, and carried them along over the Tempest.

Every one on the engine held on to the supports to save themselves from being flung to the floor, and their excitement arose in proportion to the speed at which they went.

"She can't go any swifter," said Jack, as he worked the wheel.

"Heavens, what more could a fellow want?" stammered Rockwell, his eyes bulging with astonishment.

"Keel haul me," gasped Tim, "but this ain't nuthin' ter wot I once went through?"

"Nothing?" echoed Rockwell, glaring at him skeptically. "What do you mean?"

"Why, when I wuz aboard o' ther U. S. frigate——"

"Shud yourselluf ub!" bellowed Fritz, interrupting him frantically.

"Frigate Wabash," continued Tim, ignoring the interruption with a look of intense exasperation upon his rugged face, "thar wuz a can of chloride o' nitrogen in ther magazine wot I wuz told ter fetch up on deck. I didn't know as it wuz ther most powerful explosive wot ever wuz knowed, an' I sot it under a water cask wi' the lid off, an' I sot down on ther cask. Somehow a beam o' electric light came in contact with ther can, an' it busted. I went aloft on ther cask. Fust I went through ther studdin' sail, and then through ther forestays'l. Then I started for Jupiter."

"I vish yer nefer come back!" groaned Fritz.

"But how is it you're alive now?" queried Rockwell.

"He vhas got such a cast-iron gall he bounced back to der eart' again," said Fritz.

"Avast, yer lubber," growled Tim. "Who's a-tellin' this yarn—you or me?"

"Don'd bay some addentions to him," whispered Fritz. "He vhas crazy, und don't know what he says alretty."

"Why don't you explain what saved you from destruction?" growled Rockwell.

"Haul to an' gimme a chance," the old sailor replied, wondering how he could invent a plausible reason for saving himself from an aerial flight that would have sent him moonwards in fragments.

"Well?" demanded Rockwell, after a pause.

Tim was still puzzling his inventive power.

Unfortunately he could not think of any good excuse.

"I dunno wot saved me," he blurted out at length. "I went so fast I lost my senses an' when I came to I wuz in bed—that is, in my hammock, an' ther surgeon wuz a-pumpin' wind inter me with a bellows."

"Und I subbose yer vhasn't even scratched?" sarcastically asked Fritz.

"No," admitted Tim. "They sed as they foun' me a-floatin' in ther sea ten miles off ter le'ward with my head jammed up in my hat, an' ther back of my pants blowed up atween my back an' my shirt."

Rockwell made no comment.

But he evidently did not swallow the yarn.

By this time the Tempest had covered at least eight miles, and the young inventor kept her right at it with dogged determination.

She was behaving much better than he anticipated, and he saw that the machinery was in perfect working order by the way she acted.

He glanced back at the burning prairie again, and saw that it was yet roaring along with a dull, rumbling sound, augmented by the pounding feet of the army of beasts flying before it.

A brilliant reflection of roseate tint shone in the sky, and far in advance of the monster conflagration, lending it a sublime aspect.

Ahead of the engine the search-light reflected, and he saw that they were rapidly approaching the termination of the prairie.

Far beyond it stretched a desert waste of sand.

As the boy made this observation he was suddenly startled by hearing a terrible crash behind the engine, and one side of it fell.

Instantly the boy shut off power.

"A wheel has come off!" he shouted.

The rest were startled, for there was no mistaking the indication of the sagging body of the Tempest, and they saw that she must go slower.

Indeed, without the wheel she could not travel at all.

Jack flung open the door, sprang to the ground, and ran back over the trail of the engine in search of the wheel.

Tim examined the axle and saw that it was not broken.

The nut had worked loose and fell off, liberating the wheel.

Fritz joined the young inventor in his search, but although they examined the trail back past the place where the wheel had come off, they could find no trace of it.

It was impossible to continue the journey without it, and their time for finding it was very limited, for the flames were sweeping on toward them with terrible velocity.

It had been hurled from the trail somewhere into the tall grass, they knew, but whereabouts, there was no indication.

But they plunged in among the grass, and began to search for it with a will, for they couldn't let the approaching fire ruin it.

CHAPTER X.

HUNTING AT LAKE TYRRELL.

Rockwell and Tim soon joined the young inventor and the Dutch boy in their desperate search for the missing wheel.

To and fro they went among the grass, searching every foot of the ground on the side upon which the wheel flew off, and the utmost despair took possession of them when after a most assiduous search no success crowned their efforts.

The speed at which the engine had been going had evidently hurled it further away from the trail than they at first imagined.

In the meantime the fire was momentarily drawing nearer and they yet had nearly a mile to go ere the engine would leave the prairie and reach the desert they were heading for.

Presently the fire came to within two miles of them.

Hot blasts of air came sweeping along, making them shudder and gasp, the fierce, licking tongues of flame formed an arch in the sky far in advance of the main body of the fire, great masses of smoke poured along in the upper stratas of the atmosphere, and showers of burning sparks and embers fell all around the adventurers.

Their position was becoming very dangerous.

In fact, there was every prospect of them being overwhelmed by the heat, smothered, and then roasted to death.

The showering sparks set fire to the dried-up grass in blotches here and there in advance of the main column of onrushing flames, and the birds and beasts which had not yet been overtaken by the fire were rapidly bearing down on our friends.

It seemed at last as if they must abandon their search for the missing wheel, and Jack shouted:

"Go for the Tempest!"

"Vot! Gif up?" queried Fritz.

"There's no help for it."

"I'm off," cried Rockwell, running.

"Can we reach ther desert in time?" gasped Tim, stumping after him.

"I hope so," replied Jack.

"Come on, den," groaned the Dutch boy.

"Hold on, Fritz, what's this I've stumbled over?"

"Did yer vhas found it?"

"Yes! Here's the wheel now."

"Whoop!" roared Fritz, delightedly. "Led me helb yer carry it."

Jack had picked it up by this time, as it was light, and they both ran after Tim and Rockwell, who had gone aboard the Tempest.

"Go ahead, Fritz, and get me an axle nut from the store-room," cried Jack.

"All right! Donner-vetter! Vhe vhas safed now vonct!" cried the Dutch boy, and the speed with which he ran was certainly astonishing for such a fat person, for he soon outstripped Jack.

Fortunately they had not far to run.

By the time the boy reached the engine, Fritz had a wrench, a nut and a jack out of the store-room, and they raised the axle, put the wheel on again, fastened the nut in its place and boarded the engine.

Brief as was the time lost, the conflagration was now within a mile, and they were all so hot the sweat ran off them in streams.

"Start her, Tim," yelled the boy to the old sailor who was in the pilot-house.

"Ay, ay, lad! Are all aboard?"

"All aboard!"

"Then off she goes."

And suiting the action to his words he turned the lever.

Like an arrow from a bow shot the engine.

On she rushed, ripping her way through the long grass again, and the spirits of her inmates arose when they saw her forging on ahead of the merciless, impetuous fire.

Along she swept bravely on, and in two minutes more she left the prairie and fled out on the sandy desert, pursued to the edge of the thinned-out grass by the fire.

On, on, on—mile after mile, but now no scorching flames rushed after her, the hot air expended itself, and they soon found themselves comparatively safe on the sandy desert.

They looked back at the fire.

It had raged along consuming everything in its way until it reached the sea of sand, and there it gradually died out, leaving behind it a bed of fiery ashes that extended as far as the eye could reach, dense banks of smoke curling up from it.

Some of the prairie beasts escaped with their lives by reaching the sea of sand, and the air was filled with flocks of terrified birds.

"It's a race fairly and squarely won," commented Jack, with a sigh.

"But bless'ee, lad, I thought as we wuz agoner," said Tim, gravely.

"Dot shows ve don't vhas meant ter be burned," Fritz chuckled, as he hauled his old accordion out of a box, and began to play "We Shall All be Angels in the Sweet By and By," and every one laughed.

The Tempest was brought to a pause.

On the following morning Jack made a careful examination of the engine, and found that she was in perfect order save that she needed more lubricating oil, and that the batteries needed replenishing.

While this was being done Fritz prepared breakfast.

They did ample justice to it, and then took a survey of their surroundings, whereupon they found that they were close to the Wimmera river, south of the Bullarook Desert, and near Tyrrell Lake.

They were yet one hundred miles or more from their des-

tination on the Murray river, and had a vast expanse of district before them.

"If you have time and desire to stop at the lake to the eastward," said Rockwell, "you can find any amount of sport there."

"Game?" queried Jack, interestedly.

"Game and fish. Owing to the scarcity of water on this continent there is every kind of creature common to this district to be found there."

"We don't vhas got much fresh meat left," said Fritz, "so mebbe dot vhas a good brobositions vonet."

As they all were satisfied to indulge in a few hours' sport, Jack steered the engine toward the lake, which soon appeared in view.

It lay in a hollow basin surrounded by hills, crags, and woods, and the Tempest went rattling through the shrubbery on a broad plateau, and finally came to a pause.

The underbrush teemed with wombats, phalangers, kangaroos, and bandicoots, the former creatures burrowing in the ground, native bears, much like a sloth in its habits, and numerous ring-tailed and brush-tailed opossums.

A band of wild dogs fled before the approach of the engine, and vanished among the underbrush, and the trees teemed with white eagles and parrots, emus that looked like ostriches were running through the bushes, black swans floated in the water, birds of paradise roosted on the bushes, and pigeons, ducks, geese, plovers and quail abounded by the thousands.

"It's a veritable hunter's paradise!" exclaimed Jack, as he sallied out, fully armed, followed by Fritz, "and by the time we get through with our game there will be enough meat aboard to last us a month."

Tim was left in charge of the engine.

None of them were very friendly with Rockwell, and had as little to do with him as possible, as they all disliked the man on account of his unsavory reputation.

He went off alone in an opposite direction, and they soon heard the sharp crack of his rifle among the trees.

It did not take Jack and Fritz long to get to work.

They were both expert marksmen, and brought down birds and beasts steadily, until there was a goodly heap of the game piled up in a convenient distance to the engine.

They became separated after awhile, for Jack made his way down to the edge of the lake, and Fritz went off in the woods in pursuit of a gigantic bird called the moa which could run faster than a horse.

As Jack went crashing through the bushes he heard a sibilant hiss directly over his head, and glancing around he beheld a huge monitor.

It was a fork-tongued lizard, clinging to the side of a tree.

These creatures burrow in the earth, climb and swim, and attain a length of nine feet, and the moment Jack saw it he raised his weapon to fire at it, when it hopped down on him.

With a bang it struck him on the head, and knocked him down as if hit by a cannon ball into the bushes.

His rifle was sent flying from his hand, and the lizard ran away.

He quickly recovered his weapon, and running through the bushes, he reached the edge of the lake just in time to see the beast go plunging in and start for the middle.

Jack felt annoyed at what the creature had done, as he was scratched and shaken up by his fall, and aiming his weapon he fired a shot after the swimming beast.

The bullet struck it and exploded within its body.

It was instantly killed.

Eager to examine the monster, the boy waded out in the muddy water, and headed for the carcass which floated ten yards away.

He flushed it toward him with his rifle, and seizing it by the long tail, he turned around and started to retrace his steps

back to shore through the mud, when the water ahead of him parted.

To his alarm he saw the heads and bodies of several crocodiles appear, one after the other, between him and the shore. These monsters measured thirty feet in length.

Jack came to a sudden pause, for he saw that he had attracted the attention of the great saurians, and they were then rapidly swimming toward him.

It was impossible to reach the shore at that point without passing them, and to divert their attention, the boy lifted the lizard from the water, and despite its weight of one hundred pounds, he managed to pitch it a few yards towards them.

It struck the water with a splash between him and the crocodiles.

CHAPTER XI.

HUMAN BAIT FOR CROCODILES.

The moment the crocodiles saw the carcass of the monitor, they all swam toward it with greedy avidity, and several of them seized it at once.

They were wonderfully fast swimmers, and ravenous to excess.

Having diverted their attention from him, Jack started off on a wide detour, leaving them to tear the lizard's body to pieces.

He expected to reach land in safety now, but what was his horror, when he glanced back, to see two of them come gliding after him.

Both of these crocodiles had failed to get a share of the lizard, and they came through the water at an amazing rate of speed.

Jack saw at a glance that he could not get ashore before they would intercept him, and he quickly raised his rifle, aimed at them, and fired.

The explosive bullet hit the foremost crocodile on the head and burst, tearing the roof of its skull to pieces.

That settled the fate of the beast.

But the other kept straight on toward the boy.

Jack was watching it intently, and observing its hostile intentions, he turned his weapon, aimed at it, and pulled the trigger.

There sounded a thud in the air.

But no bullet emanated.

He had used up every charge in the weapon before.

Now there was no time for him to reload the piece, and he sprang aside over knee-deep in the water, the bottom being coated with a thick ooze of mud that seemed to hold his feet down like weights.

He was just in time to escape the saurian's jaws as they came together with a loud threatening click.

Past him glided the monster, and he drew a pistol.

It had turned as quick as a wink, but the boy was ready, and poured in a dozen shots at it in rapid succession.

They proved fatal.

Nearly all the head of the crocodile was shattered, and it floated on the surface a corpse, and the boy then rushed ashore.

Crocodiles on land were easy enough to handle, but when they were in the water their actions are swift as those of a fish.

Breathless and panting, the boy ran up the embankment, when to his amazement he heard the wailing cry of an infant.

Glancing along the shore he saw that the sound came from a little naked negro baby, on its hands and knees near the shore, where it was tied by the leg to a take with a piece of vine.

"By jove!" exclaimed the boy, staring at the young one. "What a beastly thing for any one to do. Poor little chap, why have they tied you here in such easy reach of the wild beasts infesting this place?"

The little coon looked up at him and blubbered.

It evidently was too young to understand him, and very likely would not have comprehended his meaning, even if it were older.

While it was gouging its eyes with its fists forlornly Jack walked up close, and, stooping over, patted it on the woolly head.

Instead of being reassured by this action, the child yelled louder.

Jack could not help laughing at the comical figure it cut.

"Stop your bawling," he remonstrated. "I ain't going to hurt you. Jingo, what a gash of a mouth it's got! Hey, there, you young beggar, stop your squalling, will you? If you don't—"

Whiz! interposed a sound over his head.

Jack straightened up with a startled exclamation.

Looking around, he saw a stone-headed ax go flying through the air and strike the water in back of him.

A dozen more crocodiles were there creeping up the embankment, attracted by the baby's cries, and evidently intent upon devouring it.

Instantly the boy realized that the native child had been tied there as a decoy to bring the saurians ashore, so that the natives who owned it, who were hidden in the near-by bushes, could kill them.

He peered in the direction the ax came from, and saw a score of dusky figures lurking amid the shrubbery keenly watching him.

The boy was somewhat startled, as he had no means of knowing whether the blacks were friendly or hostile.

Moreover, not a shot remained in any of his fire-arms now.

Observing, however, that the crocodiles kept advancing, he withdrew his hunting-knife, severed the bonds so cruelly holding the negro baby, and picking the yelling object up in his arms, he ran toward the bushes.

At the same juncture the savages broke from cover and rushed toward him, armed with spears and axes of hard wood, stone hatchets and javelins pointed with bone.

They were dusky, well-made fellows, with sunken eyes, each one having two teeth removed from their upper jaws, their bodies dressed in a cloak of skin, fastened with skewers, but open at the right-hand side, while their headgear consisted of the tails of small animals.

Their bosoms and backs were scarred and tattooed.

For a moment Jack imagined that they were about to attack the crocodiles, but instead they surrounded him, yelling and brandishing their weapons in a most threatening manner.

One of them aimed his javelin at Jack's breast, but the boy quickly interposed the body of the infant, causing the savage to draw back his weapon and thus saved his life.

The rest closed in on Jack, however, and, dropping the child, he grasped his rifle with both hands, and, swinging it around his head, he knocked several of them flying.

A terrific struggle at once ensued, but the numbers of the blacks overwhelmed the boy, and he was presently flung to the ground, and while some of them held him, the others bound his legs and arms with some tough, fibrous vines.

Within a few minutes the boy was rendered helpless.

A bitter feeling of mortification took possession of him at finding himself in the power of the natives.

But he could not help himself.

A conference then ensued among the natives, and they divided into two parties, some of them running down to the

shore where the crocodiles were turning around and attacking the beasts, while the rest carried Jack away bodily.

Not far from the scene of the struggle several bent bark canoes were hidden in the shrubbery of a small lagoon, and the blacks embarked with their prisoner and paddled out on the lake.

From his position Jack had a good view of the shore.

He kept his eyes fastened upon it, wondering where his friends were, and listening to the unintelligible talk of the natives, when suddenly he descried the figure of Fritz.

The Dutch boy stood on a rock near the shore, intently watching the passage of the canoes, and Jack shouted:

"Help, Fritz! They've captured me."

A cry of rage broke from the savages, and one of them dealt the boy a savage blow over the mouth with his hand to silence him.

Jack saw Fritz start forward and eagerly peer out at the canoes.

"Shack," he yelled, "vhas dey got you in dot canoes?"

"Yes."

"Ach Gott!"

"Save me!"

"I dell Dim. Ve follow yer."

With blazing eyes another black sprang to his feet and drew back his spear as if to plunge it into the recumbent boy, but the leader of the party restrained him with a word.

He sank back into his seat grumblingly.

The young inventor now kept quiet, for he realized that he would only jeopardize his life by continuing to speak.

He was satisfied that his friends knew what became of him, and would make efforts to save him at the first opportunity.

He, therefore, was contented.

The savages paddled their canoe ahead, going toward the most northerly part of the lake, and Jack lay in the bottom of the frail boat, wondering what they intended to do to him.

In due course of time they reached the head waters of the lake, and running their canoes up on the sandy shore they all debarked.

A stretcher of two saplings cross-pieced with branches was hastily formed, Jack was laid on it, and a native at each end seizing the poles lifted and carried the boy along.

They passed through the tangled shrubbery that surrounded the lake in this manner, and came out on the desert where a few tufts of scant herbage grew here and there.

At certain seasons this grass grew abundantly, but the flocks of sheep and kangaroos feeding on it soon made it vanish.

The savages shaped their course across this desert, and the hot sun beating down upon Jack's face nearly blinded him.

In vain the boy watched for some sign of the Tempest following him, for it did not appear as the hours slipped by.

The natives presently reached the end of the desert and plunged into the interminable bush that characterizes Australia.

Here they paused and made camp.

Jack was laid on the ground, a fire was built, and the blacks began to cook their dinner and pass around a gourd of water.

Before they could begin their meal, however, one of the men who had been on duty as a guard came running into the camp and shouted something excitedly to the rest.

They thereupon seized their weapons and sprang to their feet, and darting into the underbrush they all disappeared.

Wondering what the trouble was, Jack listened intently, and presently heard the sounds of strife made up of the reports of weapons and the shouting of savages and white men.

It was evident to the boy that a hard fight was in progress.

CHAPTER XII.

AMONG THE TREASURE SEEKERS.

It became very evident to Jack that if the savages were fighting a party of white men they were very liable to be defeated.

In that case they might fail to return, when he was apt to die where he was of starvation, if not devoured by wild beasts.

It then occurred to him that he might manage to liberate himself, and casting his glance around, it rested upon a jagged stone lying a few yards away, upon an edge of which he thought he might rub his bonds, sever them and then get free.

In order to reach the stone he rolled over and over, until he thus brought his body close to it, when he lay over upon his back, and pressing the binding vines upon it, began to move his arms up and down and gradually sawed through them.

This operation was attended by several gashes and bruises on his skin, but he doggedly persisted and the thongs parted with a snap.

His arms were thus freed.

Then he unfastened his legs with his fingers.

In a moment more he was upon his feet.

The savages had not touched his pistols, but one of them had his rifle.

In his pocket he had some ammunition, and loading his weapons he clutched them in his hands and dove into the bush after the natives.

He thus made his way along for a distance of several hundred yards, in the direction from which the firing had come, and it led him toward a small ravine in the rocks that were towering up some distance ahead of him.

Suddenly he came to a clearing in the bush and paused.

Parting the thicket he peeped through.

Just then he heard a low, gasping cry near where he stood and his glance fell upon a most thrilling scene.

Upon the ground lay a white man in the garb of a miner, and kneeling upon his body was one of the natives, clutching him by the throat with one hand and raising a stone ax over his head with the other.

In one moment more the savage would have driven the keen blade into the miner's skull, killing him instantly.

But Jack raised one of his pistols and fired at the native. The ball pierced his brain.

He gave a despairing yell, and sprang to his feet.

Reeling, he fell flat on the ground at the feet of his victim.

The amazed white man bounded to his feet, and the boy dashed into the clearing in front of him, increasing his surprise.

"Saved!" he gasped.

"What's the trouble here?" inquired Jack.

"This is a mining camp," replied the man. "The savages attacked us."

"Have you beaten them?"

"Badly. This fellow was the last one alive."

"Where are your companions?"

"In yonder ravine."

"Did this fellow hurt you?"

"No. I pursued him, tripped, fell, and he thus caught me."

"Well, you had a close call of it, sir."

"In Heaven's name, where did you come from?"

"I was a prisoner of the savages in their camp over there."

"Ah! You escaped them?"

"Yes. Cut my bonds."

"Where did they pick you up?"

"At my camp on Lake Tyrrell."

"Did you have any friends?"

"Several. They are, I expect, following me."

"Well, come on over to our camp till I see how they have fared."

The man started away with Jack beside him.

"What are you mining?" queried the boy.

"Gold," was the reply. "We were prospecting in the ravine and found a placer and followed it up."

As they turned into the ravine Jack saw some tents looming up along a creek that traversed the gorge.

The bank of the creek was lined with cradles and gold washers in full operation, as the treasure hunters had returned to their work as soon as the blacks were all seen to have been exterminated.

"Rock-rock! Swish-swash!" went the cradles in the water as the eager gold seekers lost not a moment amassing their wealth.

It was an interesting scene to the boy.

The cradles were placed lengthwise with the water, the cradleman holding the handle in his left hand, and with a stick broke the lumps of earth and stirred up the contents of the cradle.

The watermen stood at the head of the cradle with a ladle and kept continually baling water into it, while a third man carefully washed into a large tin dish the deposit which fell through the sieves in the cradle on the boards beneath.

He stood knee deep in the water, tilting the dish under, and shook its contents, the precious metal falling to the bottom, while the dirt and sand were washed out by the water.

After long washing the glittering gold dust lay along the bottom edges of the dish, and was carefully washed into a pan, dried over a fire, and then packed for carrying away.

The cradlemen examined the quartz stones in the upper sieve for quartz gold, and occasionally found pieces of great value.

Jack was amazed at what he saw.

"They are a cool lot—a dozen men, and all Englishmen," he observed.

"No, there's Scotch, Irish, German, and Frenchmen among them," replied the miner whom he saved, "and I'm an Irish-American."

"They don't seem to let their brush with the black men trouble them."

"They haven't time to. Every moment wasted means so much less gold to be gathered to-day and all are eager to amass a fortune as speedily as possible, can't you see?"

"What became of the blacks?"

"Every one but the fellow you finished is floating down the creek."

"Dead?"

"No doubt of it."

Some of the miners now saw Jack.

His companion explained matters to them and they kept on working.

Then he turned to the boy and told him that they had gathered a large amount of gold, which was to be sent to Melbourne in drays, when a rush for this spot would be made when the news spread.

They wanted to gather as much of the gold as they could get ere the place was reported, and a commissioner sent there who would regulate matters for the government, so that every one would have to be taxed 30 shillings for a license to stake a claim and hunt.

When this explanation was made they stood close to a heap of rocks behind which a man was hiding, who overheard every word the man said, and as the miner led Jack away, the lurking stranger crept off into the bush unseen and disappeared.

Jack was shown all around the camp and explained to

the man what trouble he and his party had undergone, to which the miner listened attentively, and with a very grave face.

"Captain Moonlight is a terror to the surrounding country," said the man, when Jack concluded. "And we have reason to dread him, for when we transport our gold from here we will have to keep a lookout for him. He has no conscience and would rob us of every ounce of gold we have if he should run across our drays and defeat us in a fight."

"Are you much troubled by the natives?" asked Jack.

"Not often, but when they do come their parties are so few in number that we seldom have any trouble whipping them and the same crowd never returns to molest us."

"As I can find no trace of my friends coming after me," said Jack, "I am going to start back on the trail of the natives who carried me away and meet them."

"Wait. Why don't you go up on the rocks over there, and from their top you can gain a good view of the country for miles in the direction you came from," suggested the miner.

"That's a good plan. I'll try it," said Jack.

He saw that the man was anxious to get back to his work. So he left him, went over to the mouth of the ravine and began to ascend the rocks to an eminence over his head.

It was a hard climb, but the boy soon reached the top, and shading his eyes from the sun with his hands he looked round.

The landscape was clear in every direction.

He saw nothing of the Tempest though.

But another sight met his view.

A short distance away a large body of horsemen galloping at a rapid rate straight toward the ravine.

A cry of alarm pealed from the boy.

For he saw that they were his old enemies, the bushmen.

There was no mistaking the gigantic figure of Captain Moonlight in the lead, mounted upon his big white horse.

The man who had been lurking behind the rocks and heard the dialogue between Jack and the miner was one of the bushman's gang, and he had, after discovering the camp and learned how much gold they collected, returned to his gang and reported the matter to Captain Moonlight.

The thieves were now bent upon raiding the camp.

Filled with apprehension Jack went scrambling down from the rocks to the camp and startled the miners by yelling:

"Arm yourselves! Arm yourselves! Captain Moonlight and his gang of bushmen are coming this way at a gallop!"

Everyone was startled by the boy's warning.

CHAPTER XIII.

TREACHERY ABOARD THE ENGINE.

The miners dashed from the creek to their tents to get their arms, and Jack ran among them as they emerged, describing what he had seen.

Within a few moments the utmost excitement prevailed in the camp, for the miners' hearts were filled with misgivings that the outlaws had gained information of their wealth and had come to rob them.

Rendered desperate at the prospect of losing all they had, every one of them made a mental resolution to fight to the bitter end rather than let their enemies triumph over them.

It puzzled Jack to account for Captain Moonlight's gang having come so far from the Red Light Inn; but the fact was that they had been pursued by a force of cavalry, and barely escaping with their lives, they had come back into the interior to remain in seclusion until the excitement against them near the cities subsided.

Indeed, the boy subsequently learned from Rockwell that the bushmen diversified their regular operations of the high roads by flying trips into the country, to attack the small mining settlements.

In this manner the daring outlaws had even raided the celebrated Burra Burra, the Wheal Gawler, the Princess Royal, and the Ballarat mines at different intervals, with remarkable success.

The boy saw that the miners were so much excited they lacked the proper generalship necessary to successfully resist their enemies with any hope for driving them away.

He sprang to the head of the huddled group, and interrupting their conversation, he cried:

"If you will trust me, I'll try to save you."

"How?" eagerly asked a dozen voices.

"By doing as I say."

"What can we do?"

"Scatter among the rocks."

"Yes, yes."

"Do not fire till I give the order!"

Glad to follow any instruction that might avail them, they quickly formed the ambuscade Jack planned, at the entrance to the ravine and sank out of sight behind the rocks.

An intense silence followed, the ravine having a deserted look, and they impatiently awaited the approach of the bushmen, while Jack finished his instructions of how they were to act.

In the course of a few minutes they heard the pounding of horses' hoofs, which rapidly drew nearer, and then the bandits burst into view and headed for the gorge.

As they swept past the hidden miners, two score strong, and all masked, they set up a terrific yell and began to discharge their weapons, intending to strike terror to their intended victims at the outset.

No sooner had the whole troop passed within the ravine, when Jack sprang up and shouted:

"Fire upon them, boys!"

Quick to obey, the miners complied.

A destructive fire was poured down upon the bushmen upon both sides of the gorge, taking them completely by surprise. A dozen of them fell wounded.

And amid a wild chorus of alarmed cries they fled.

"An ambush!" roared Captain Moonlight, furiously. "Go ahead! Fly, boys, or they will cut us down to a man!"

Bang—bang—bang! rattled a second volley from the rocks. The outlaws fled up the ravine.

They were taken completely by surprise.

Away they dashed at full speed, and a cheer pealed from the miners, for the outlaws had not fired a single shot in return.

Up the gorge they rallied, however, and coming to a halt, Captain Moonlight collected his men and began to plan a second attack.

At this juncture there sounded a crashing noise out of the ravine, and glancing in the direction the sound came from, Jack was surprised and delighted to see the Tempest come rushing through the shrubbery from around the rocks.

The boy sprang into view of Tim, who was guiding the engine, and waving his hat to the old sailor he screamed:

"This way, Tim—this way!"

"Hurroo!" roared the old salt, pointing at Jack. "Thar he are now."

Fritz and Rockwell appeared in the pilot-house window and looked out at the boy, and the old sailor started the engine straight for the mouth of the ravine.

On she came, cutting her way through the shrubbery, and there arose surprised expressions from the ambuscaded miners.

"What is that thing?" was the question that arose on all sides.

"She belongs to me," cried Jack. "It's an electric prairie engine."

Every one gazed at the odd contrivance in great curiosity, and as soon as it came into the ravine Jack descended from the rocks.

The bushmen saw him, and a volley was fired at the boy.

He crouched behind a convenient rock ere the screaming bullets left their weapons, and thus escaped being shot.

Tim stopped the Tempest.

The next moment Jack sprang aboard, and his friends greeted him warmly.

In a few words he explained what occurred, and going into the pilot-house, the screens were pulled over the windows, and grasping the wheel, he turned the lever and started the Tempest ahead.

"Watch me scatter the bandits now," he shouted to the miners.

He did not ask for their assistance, for he saw that the outlaws, holding the engine in wholesome dread, began to retreat when they observed the engine approaching them.

Jack raised the knife-blades and away rushed the Tempest.

The Tempest was rapidly overhauling them and Jack exclaimed:

"Get ready to fire on them now."

"Not I," sullenly replied Rockwell, thrusting his hands in his pockets.

"What! Revolting?" demanded Jack.

"No. But I didn't bargain with you to fight my old friends."

"Then you yet sympathize with them?"

"Believe so if you like," was the defiant reply.

"Didn't you sever your connection with them?"

"Yes; I'm done with their mode of living."

Tim and Fritz each went to the ports and aimed at the bushmen, and Jack told them to fire upon Captain Moonlight.

Rockwell looked as if he didn't like this assault on his friends, but he dared not dispute Jack, so he muttered something and slunk into the back room and disappeared from view.

The sailor and the Dutch boy opened fire on the bandits, but it seemed to be utterly impossible to hit their huge chieftain.

Bunched again, the bushmen galloped away, and it seemed as if the Tempest was bound to overhaul them now.

Jack turned the lever all the way around.

She shot ahead faster for a moment and then began to stop just as it seemed almost certain they would come up with the bushmen.

Jack looked perplexed.

He worked at the levers, but all to no purpose.

The Tempest went slower and slower, until at last she paused and nothing Jack tried could induce her to go on.

Away went the thieves toward a distant copse of maples, and Jack saw them disappear.

By that time the truth flashed across his mind, and he exclaimed:

"There's been some underhanded work in this, boys."

"Wot's gone wrong?" queried Tim, with a scowl.

"Dot baddery don't could been played ould," said Fritz, "cause I vhas put me some chemicals in doze chars mineselluf yesterday alretty."

"I know it. The machinery has been tampered with."

"Who done it, lad?"

"I suspect Rockwell."

"Whar's the lubber?"

"Back in the dining-room. Come on, and I'll find out what he did."

Followed by his friends, Jack passed into the adjoining

apartment and there found Rockwell leaning moodily against the wall, looking out one of the windows, with an ugly frown upon his face.

He glanced searchingly at the young inventor, and his face grew white.

"Well?" he asked expectantly. "What do you want?"

"Rockwell, you have been tampering with the engine!" said Jack.

"Suppose I have?"

"You don't deny it then?"

"No. I wanted to do my friends a good turn."

"By practicing treachery upon us?"

"Call it what you like, I did it——"

"What?" asked Jack angrily.

"Cut one of the electric wires."

"We can't trust you then. You have broken your oath."

"I wouldn't do anything against you for any one but my old friends."

"In that case, every time we meet them you will act against us for them?"

"Well, I would not swear that I would."

"Still, we can't trust you. I am going to put you under restraint."

"Oh, I wouldn't submit to that."

"You must, if you want me to keep my agreement with you."

The boy made a gesture to Tim and Fritz and they approached Rockwell, but with an oath the man recoiled and drew his revolver.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHASING A KANGAROO.

It was apparent that Rockwell meant to fight against Jack's order, and as he was such a reckless and desperate man, the boy realized that there would be bloodshed aboard of the Tempest if he was not careful.

"Stop that!" Jack exclaimed sternly. "Put up your gun."

"I'll shoot the first one who attempts to attack me," hissed Rockwell in ugly tones, as he raised his weapon and aimed it at Tim.

The Dutch boy and the old sailor came to a pause and glanced questioningly at Jack.

"Shall we nail ther lubber?" queried Tim undauntedly.

"Ach, I don't vhas avrait of his pistols," said Fritz, disdainfully.

"Wait," said Jack. "Now, see here, Rockwell."

"Drive ahead," came the sullen rejoinder.

"We can easily master you."

"Some one will die first," was the grim reply.

"Granted. Still we would kill you afterwards as sure as fate."

"I don't want to die."

"Neither do we."

"Then how are we to settle the question, Wright?"

"You have got to accede to my orders, or we'll abandon our chase for the diamond, put you off the engine, and shoot you on sight afterwards as we would any of the rest of Captain Moonlight's gang."

The rascal pondered a moment.

He realized that he was at the boy's mercy.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked with a scowl.

"Swear that you won't aid any of our enemies in future."

"It is easy for me to break such an oath again."

"But I'll have faith in your keeping it."

"That's flattering. But you've guessed right when you say it."

"You would break an oath a second time, would you?"

"Never. That's one good trait about me."

"Then don't be stubborn. Swear what I told you to."

Rockwell hesitated a moment, turning the point over in his mind, but he finally let his avarice get the best of his loyalty.

"I swear it," he exclaimed, holding up his right hand.

"That will do," remarked Jack. "I will trust your word. Now, show Fritz which wire you severed, so he can mend it."

Rockwell pocketed his revolver and obeyed Jack, when the Dutch boy repaired the damage and Tim returned to the pilot-house.

As soon as the break was repaired Jack started the engine.

By that time all the bushmen had disappeared, and they took their wounded companions with them.

When night fell upon the scene they had but thirty miles more to go to reach the banks of the Murray river, but as the road was very bad for traveling the boy brought the Tempest to a pause in a cluster of bottle trees.

They were singular looking things.

They stood near some myrtles and acacias growing in sandy soil, and to reach them our friends had to pass through a thorny brake.

The trees varied from thirty-five to sixty feet in height, with huge branches at their summits, the trunks measuring forty feet around, and were bottle-shaped.

These strange trees, supposed to be thousands of years old, are often tapped by stockmen, and the glutinous sap is extracted, forming a refreshing beverage.

On the following morning the sun shone down cheerfully, and after breakfast Jack went into the pilot-house, when, upon glancing out the window, he beheld a huge boomer, or male kangaroo, browsing the grass.

He was an extraordinary big fellow, measuring about eight feet from nose to tail end, of a brown color, mingled with gray, and the expression of its face was a compound of gentleness and fierceness.

Its tail, on which it stood with its hind legs, was a powerful structure, and it had uncommonly long, sharp, formidable-pointed claws on the ends of its hind feet, with which it could launch a blow that would lay open a dog.

Hunting these creatures is a favorite Australian sport and one attended by great danger, for though gentle by nature, once brought to bay they fight with desperate ferocity.

Although the engine was well stocked with game from their last hunt at Lake Tyrrell, the moment Jack saw the boomer he made up his mind to give chase to it and bring it down.

He hastily apprised his friends of the fact, and told Tim to man the wheel, start the machinery, and chase it.

The boy then armed himself with a rifle, and going out on the front platform, he said with a laugh:

"I won't take much undue advantage of that fellow. Before I put a ball in him this engine must approach to within ten yards of him."

"Dot vhas fair enough," assented Fritz approvingly.

"I knows cases whar men wot calls tharselves hunters would drive a deer inter ther water an' shoot it while it wuz a-swimming," said Tim.

"There is no true sport in killing a beast that hasn't got a chance for its life running," said Jack, "but in the case of the monitor lizard I shot the case was much different."

Just then the kangaroo began to stand up on its tiptoe and peer over the bushes toward the Tempest.

Not satisfied with the scrutiny, it hopped up and down until it had gained a good view of the engine.

But the moment the electrical machine started and went tearing its way through the scrub, the boomer made a flying leap through the air by the use of its tail and hind legs.

It steered itself with its tail, as a rudder steers a ship, and the length of each leap it made not only measured fifteen

feet, but its claw marks were spaced as evenly apart as if measured for it.

Away it sprang with the Tempest tearing after it, and the hunt began.

Everyone became excited to see if the boomer would beat the engine.

On they rushed, and with a few moments it became apparent that the kangaroo was fast leaving the engine behind it.

"Put on more current, Tim," exclaimed Jack.

"Ay, ay," cheerily answered the old fellow, complying.

With additional power on, the engine ripped its way faster through the scrub, and the boomer without a moment's hesitation started quicker and shot away from the Tempest apparently without an effort.

An exciting race now began between the beast and the engine, for while the kangaroo leaped straight ahead, never stopping for anything, the Tempest, which went faster than the animal, had to make detours every few minutes in order to avoid trees, rocks, and other obstructions.

In this manner there was an even distance maintained between them, which was not materially changed despite old Tim Topstay's indomitable skill at navigation to save time and space.

A level stretch of prairie soon opened up ahead of them with the kangaroo far in the lead, and a cheer for the beast pealed from Tim and Fritz when they saw it keeping its lead by the wonderful and rapid leaps it made to escape the engine.

Jack maintained his position on the front platform, clinging to one of the uprights, and watched the actions of the leaping beast with the most intense interest.

"What a model that boomer suggests," he soliloquized, "for a machine of immense speed to bound over the earth like a rubber ball. The driving power of that tail and those hind quarters, combined with their untiring elasticity, must be phenomenal."

"Thar's half power on now," said Tim.

"How fast is she going?" queried the boy.

"Makin' thirty knots an hour, lad."

"Increase the speed."

"How much?"

"Ten more miles."

"Here she goes."

The Tempest shot ahead faster.

But so did the kangaroo.

"How long dot poomer vhas been able to keeb dot ub?" queried Fritz.

"Not as long as this engine," said Jack.

"Ve vhas gainin' now."

"Yes, but we are almost across the prairie. Now look ahead there."

"Voods, by shiminey!"

"He may escape me after all, for I will give him fair play by withholding my shot till he is within the stipulated distance."

Half a mile further and the kangaroo reached the woods fifty yards in advance of the engine, and sprang in among the bushes and trees, and Tim had to keep his remaining eye wide open to steer the engine so as to avoid the massive tree trunks.

"Hurrah for the boomer!" exclaimed Jack. "He's game, anyway!"

The Tempest just then dashed into a clearing, and a shout arose from the inmates of the engine.

"He's down," yelled Tim, bringing the Tempest to a pause.

"Go for him vonet!" laughed Fritz.

Jack jumped to the ground.

The kangaroo had turned a complete somersault, and lay panting against a tree; nor did it offer to get up as the boy approached.

ugly teeth were shown, and it turned its beautiful, soft-expressioned eyes upon the boy with a half-defiant, half-beseeching look.

Jack raised his rifle, and aimed at it.

He had won the beast, but saw that he only got it by an accident, which looked very much as if the kangaroo had sprained a leg.

For an instant the unfortunate creature's life hung in the balance, and every one on the Tempest watched to see it fall dead.

But Jack's heart was moved to pity.

He lowered his weapon.

"Noble fellow!" he exclaimed. "I can't kill you in cold blood! You fought gallantly for your life. But for this accident you would have beaten me. Live on. I am not ruthless. You deserve your life."

And shouldering his gun he strode back to the Tempest, pitying the boomer and admiring it from the bottom of his heart.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CITY OF METAL.

Half an hour afterwards the engine reached the bank of the Murray river, and turning to Rockwell, the young inventor defined their location, and asked:

"Which direction are we to follow now in order to reach the deep ravine, containing the village of metal mined from the hills, in which the splendid barbarians live who have possession of the great diamond?"

"We are within two miles of the locality," replied Rockwell, referring to the map of the place which he had drawn, "but in order to reach it we must pass through a denser bush than any we have hitherto met."

"Shape our course then," said Jack.

"Follow the course of this river westward."

"Are there any special preparations to make?"

"None except to prepare against an attack."

"Good. Fritz, close up all the windows and fasten the doors."

"Yah," replied the Dutch boy, starting to execute this order.

"Tim, prepare all our weapons for use."

"Ay, ay, lad," replied the old salt.

"And get the suits of armor in readiness."

"Werry good, sir," said Tim, leaving the room.

"Rockwell, unbind those electric wires from the brass posts on the wall in back of you, and bring their ends over to the binding posts on these metal plates on the floor."

"Is it safe to handle them?"

"Perfectly. But let me caution you to put on a pair of rubber shoes and gloves, which you will find in the store-room, and be careful not to come in contact with any metal surface with any insulated part of your body when I electrify the whole engine."

"What are you going to do that for?"

"To shock any of the blacks who may try to board us and repel them."

"That's a good plan," commented the outlaw, complying.

He smiled grimly to himself when he thought of the surprise of any native who might be unlucky enough to meddle with the Tempest.

When everything was in readiness Jack turned the Tempest westward, and she ran through the dense shrubbery for some distance, and finally emerged into a vast thicket.

It was taller, denser, and harder to penetrate than any

they were in, and verifying Rockwell's words and ^{fig} giving them some trouble.

By keeping a heavy current driving the engine, however, Jack sent her cutting a path through it in as direct a course for the ravine as Rockwell could suggest.

Their progress was necessarily slower than usual, but it was just as certain, for the bushes could not withstand the powerful and keen-edged knives driven by such terrific force.

"It's like a-cuttin' a passage through ther ice in the polar regions," commented Tim, as he took a bite of navy plug, "at ther time I wuz up at the North Pole—"

"You at the North Pole?" involuntarily echoed Jack, sarcastically.

The remark took him off his guard for the lie that was to follow.

"Ay, lad," cheerfully said Tim, snapping at his victim with astonishing avidity. "We got nipped in a floe ten degrees north o' Greenland, and it begun to rain icebergs."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Jack.

"Hailstones, I mean," said Tim, modestly. "Anyway, ther trench in which our craft wuz stuck filled up an' froze us in solid as iron. Thar we wuz, an' thar we'd a-stayed if I hadn't a perposed choppin' her out. So we set ter work with a will, an' hacked away till we cut a passage clear ter open water. A gale o' wind arose and blowed our craft through. We couldn't stop her. On we went fer ten days a-scuddin' under bare poles in that air open polar sea, an' then we run afoul o' a leetle round island with a flagpole on it."

"The North Pole, I presume?" said Jack.

"Ay, now, an' so it wuz."

"How did you know it was?"

"'Cause thar wuz ther stars and stripes nailed ter ther top o' it, an' underneath it wuz a signboard wi' ther name o' Captain Kane cut in it with a jack knife," triumphantly said Tim.

"Vhas dot all?" queried Fritz, wiping the perspiration from his face.

"Ain't it enough?"

"Nein. Tell us some more vonet."

"Wot for?"

"Dis vetter vhas so plamed hot I like to hear apoud ice."

Tim gave a grunt of disgust, and squirted a mouthful of tobacco juice in Bismarck's eye, sending the parrot flying into the back room swearing like a pirate.

Just then Rockwell pointed out the window.

"Look at the natives," he exclaimed.

"Why, the bush is swarming with them," remarked Jack.

A number of kinky heads were seen dotting the hedgey landscape, and the expressions upon their dusky faces as their owners viewed the engine showed plainly that they were mortally afraid of it.

They kept dodging to and fro, popping up here and there, then skurrying along, vanishing, reappearing, and acting altogether in the most erratic manner imaginable.

"Are they some of the race we have got to encounter?" asked Jack.

"Yes, I can tell them by their netted head-dress," replied Rockwell.

"The machine terrifies them thus far."

"I hope it will continue to do so."

"You said they were idolators, didn't you?"

"After a fashion. They have a mythical deity."

"What is it, Rockwell?"

"Their image, in which the diamond is buried, typifies it. The only god they know is that of Buddha. He is represented as a gigantic old man, who has been lying asleep for ages, with his head resting on his arm, which is buried deep in the sand. They expect that some day he will awake and eat up the whole world."

"Du wieer religious belief."

"They have no religion beyond these gloomy dreams."

"How about their way of living?"

"Oh, their notions of duty relate mostly to neighborly service and social interest among themselves. They are not all thieves and liars, but some are capable of good deeds."

"Are there many of them to contend against?"

"The numbers of the natives are steadily diminishing in Australia, but a remnant of the race exists in each of the provinces, while a few tribes wander over the interior. Most of the are nomads, never tilling the soil or raising cattle, having no permanent dwellings, but content themselves with mere hovels for temporary shelter, made of bowers formed by tree branches or piled logs covered with grass or bark, which they can erect in an hour wherever they camp."

"The fellows we are going to see are exceptional, then?"

"Very. As I once told you, they resemble the Mexican Aztecs in their customs, but as you can see by their resemblance to the nomads who captured you, they all come of the same stock."

The boy questioned Rockwell closely about the road he was to travel, the difficulties and dangers he might have to encounter, and asked about many other things equally as pertinent.

In the meantime he kept the engine forcing its way ahead, and they presently were made aware of the proximity of the natives by feeling a shower of boomerangs, stone hatchets, and bone-tipped javelins strike the machine's deck-houses.

This bombardment came from a skirmish line of the blacks, who had more courage than some, who ran away at the approach of the Tempest in alarm.

None of the weapons so much as dented the wire work.

Had they been rifle bullets they could not have penetrated it.

In a short time there loomed up ahead of the Tempest a mass of frowning crags from the midst of the scrub, and Rockwell said:

"There's our point of destination now."

"Does the ravine rest within those rocks?" asked Jack.

"Precisely. You will have to turn nearer to the river to find the entrance."

Jack twisted the wheel around, and the engine curved to the right, and soon forced her way over to the mouth of the gorge, and then burst from the underbrush, flinging up a vast shower of the thorny thicket wood and leaving behind her a long, wide track as a sample of her immense power.

Every one was in the pilot-house, and as they gazed down into the immense and deep ravine through which flowed a creek from the Murray river, they beheld at last the city of metal.

It was a strange looking settlement, most of the houses being one story in height, without windows, and having small doors, only big enough to admit the passage of a person on hands and knees.

In the midst of the place there arose a huge building of a Moorish style of architecture, which Rockwell pointed out as the sacred temple, in which lay the idol of Buddha.

The streets were swarming with native men, women, and children, whose excited voices reached Jack's ears quite distinctly.

They were pointing up the acclivity at the Tempest, and running to and fro in the greatest excitement, for couriers had brought in word that the strange engine was coming.

"Behold the city of the Melanesians," exclaimed Rockwell.

"And yonder huge building contains the diamond-studded idol?"

"Exactly."

"Are you all ready?"

"Yes."

"Then here she goes for the big diamond."

And so saying, Jack drove the Tempest down into the gorge.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE TEMPLE COURT-YARD.

As the Tempest ran down into the gorge toward the city of metal lining the banks of the creek, the Melanesians set up a great clamor.

The declining rays of the sun cut down into the deep gorge, and Jack saw that Rockwell's version of these aborigines being like the Mexican Aztecs was correct in many particulars.

The dusky, bearded fellows fled before the Tempest in alarm.

With their wives and children they crept through their small doors, and in a remarkably short space of time the queer city was deserted.

On rattled the engine, straight toward the great Moorish temple in which lay the diamond-studded idol of Buddha, with its saucer-sized diamond, and she soon reached the middle of the city.

Every one on the engine was armed, and ready to repulse any native who might venture to attack them, and the wires were prepared by which Jack could electrify the entire machine by simply turning one of the levers.

"No trouble yet," remarked the boy.

"None," answered Rockwell. "But look out!"

"Say, Shack," said Fritz, suddenly.

"Well?"

"I vhas been tinkin'."

"About what?"

"Don'd yer vhas noticed vot a glear drail dis engine leafs?"

"Of course I do. What of it?"

"Vell, s'bosen Captain Moonlightds vhas follow us by id from dot gold hunders' gamp, ter got efen fer det lickin' ve vhas grief his men, und makes us some drubbles alretty?"

"True. If they joined forces with these blacks we would have a hard time of it."

"Hard aport!" sung out Tim just then, as he turned the prairie engine around a building and ran her into the big open square in front of the temple.

The city of metal was laid out in the form of a spider-web, and the great temple arose from the middle of it.

It was a tremendous one-storied building, with immense porticoes and great colonnades, a vast arched entrance at one side, on a level with the ground, and the entire structure enclosing an extraordinary large square court-yard in the center.

The engine was steered to go through it, when out of the entrance swarmed an army of black priests in robes of skin, armed with stone battle-axes and shields of burnished metal.

Forming a solid phalanx before the door, while some began a weird chant, others set up a defiant shouting, and the rest began to heap abuses upon the invaders in their own tongue.

Warlike gestures were made that plainly showed that the blacks would stubbornly resist any intrusion in their temple.

Undaunted by these menaces, however, Jack continued to send the Tempest rolling toward them, and the terrible knife-blades were lowered and gleamed brightly in the rays of the declining sun.

When the engine arrived within fifty yards of them Jack said:

"They mean fight."

"Shall we fire now?" asked Rockwell.

"Not till I tell you to."

"Och, it vhas petter dot ve drife dem back," said Fritz.
"I don't intend that any of them shall wantonly be killed," said Jack quietly. "We have every advantage of them, for while our weapons can reach them theirs can't touch us. It would therefore be cruel to shoot them down needlessly. If it should come to such a crisis that there is no alternative, then fire!"

This was a very humane view of the situation.

Still, it did not seem to suit the rest.

Jack, however, was determined to let events shape their course by steadily driving the engine ahead, and if the natives tried to interfere with him they would simply precipitate their own doom. The idol was in the court-yard of the temple, and to get at it they would have to force their way in.

This the boy was resolved upon doing.

Hence he steered the Tempest straight for the door, and as the priests did not get out of its way he did not seek to avoid them.

As a result the engine rushed straight amongst them.

The knife-blades struck several of the dusky fellows and cut and wounded them, their yells of agony raising such a tumult that the whole body of blacks gave way before them.

Instead of retreating, however, they merely avoided the weapons of the engine to escape getting cut.

A shower of stone weapons were hurled at the Tempest from all sides, and struck her all over.

Aside from the banging of these implements against the wire and metal, no result was produced to satisfy the blacks.

Then a great outcry arose from the mass.

Headed by the head priest of the temple, they made a rush for the Tempest, and in a moment surrounded her.

Every one of them were frenzied with excitement.

Without the least hesitation a score of them on each side began to scramble upon the machine, with the intention of attacking the inmates of the engine, all of whom were plain to be seen through the woven wire top.

A volley of blows was rained against the pilot-house, when Jack reached over and turned one of the levers.

A heavy current of electricity was thus turned into the metal of the entire machine, and as the natives were all barefooted, they got the full benefit of it.

No sooner had they felt the shock, when they gave utterance to the most terrific cries, and made a dash to leap from the engine.

Some jumped, some went off backward, some dove head first, and others who had laid their hands as well as their feet on the machine found themselves unable to let go and escape.

In a minute every one who could get away from the Tempest did so, while those who could not had to remain, feeling the electricity until Jack released them by shutting off the current.

Then they too got away.

Explanations and warnings were shouted by the shocked ones to those who witnessed their capers in deep perplexity, and they all took great care now to avoid contact with the mysterious Tempest, as none knew anything about electricity.

The engine began now to terrify them.

Yet they continued to bombard her with their weapons, and a greater clamor than ever arose among them.

Jack now turned another lever, and blue sparks began to snap all over the Tempest with a crackling noise, and so alarmed the natives that they ran away.

The doorway had been reached by this time.

No one remained there to obstruct the entrance of the Tempest, and Jack sent her rolling into the great court-yard.

The place was filled with tropical vegetation, rank weeds and grass, and in the center of the place our friends saw the

reclining figure of a great, dark-colored metal idol of hideous aspect.

It was fully ten feet in length, and five in height, made of gold, and lay upon a pedestal of stone.

All around the vast court-yard there were doors and windows opening into innunerable rooms honey-combing the temple, and our friends saw scores of the blacks flitting through these chambers, excitedly talking and pointing out at the engine.

"We ain't through with them yet," said Jack, grimly.

"By no means," assented Rockwell. "But there is the idol now."

Jack brought the Tempest to a pause beside the monstrous object, and a dazzling glare of light shone in their eyes.

It was the great diamond, imbedded in the forehead of the idol.

With exclamations of wonder and admiration the three friends stared at the beautiful gem, and saw that Rockwell's description was not exaggerated.

The stone was pure white, and faceted and polished—not as evenly or finely as our modern lapidaries now cut precious stones—yet, withal, most admirably cut, considering that savages did it, and the crude implements employed with which the work must have been done.

A golden shaft of the declining sun slanting down over the western wall of the temple upon the stone caused it to flash and scintillate with a thousand prismatic hues that dazzled the eyes.

The stone measured about three inches across the face, and was imbedded in the gold, its setting covering the edge to such an extent that when taken out it would very likely be much wider.

The face of the idol was an ugly one, and the body was covered with carved inscriptions of various kinds, tufts of grass grew from its niches, moss and creeping vines clothed it in patches, and lizards of various colors were playing about it without the least fear.

So close was the engine to it that our friends had only to descend to the ground and mount the rough, broken stone steps of the pedestal, to reach the head and cut the diamond out of its setting.

But it was very evident that they could not get the gem without a struggle, as the savages would very likely contest their raid on it.

"My words, you see, are true," said Rockwell, pointing at the stone.

"The diamond is a wonder," replied Jack admiringly.

"But ve don't vhas got it yet alretty," Fritz chimed in.

"Ay, Fritz," said the sailor, "an' thar's only four on us agin a whole tribe."

He pointed out significantly, and his friends saw that hundreds of the villagers were swarming into the courtyard, arousing a great din with their excited voices.

CHAPTER XVII.

GETTING THE BIG DIAMOND.

All of the natives were armed and greatly excited, and their several leaders were haranguing them in their strange tongue.

The sun sunk out of sight, and twilight fell.

Night was bound to become dangerous for their project.

"We must act at once," said Jack, foreseeing trouble by waiting.

"Ay, lad, but wot are we ter do?" queried Tim, in troubled tones.

"I am going to mount the pedestal and cut the diamond out."

"Dot vhas sure de't mitondt some helbs," the Dutch boy said.

"They'll kill us for this," moodily predicted Rockwell.

"Ain't you willing to fight to get it?" quickly asked Jack.

"From in here. But I won't venture out."

"What! Are you afraid?"

"My past experience with these people makes me timid."

"Then you expect a half interest in the diamond, and won't help to get it?"

"Of course I do."

An expression of disgust crossed Jack's face, and he cast an indignant look of reproach upon the man, and replied sharply:

"If you don't help us to get the stone, you won't get an interest in it."

"I'll fight for you from within the cage."

"Well, boys," said Jack, turning to Tim and Fritz. "I'll have to rely on you alone, I see. You can both follow me, and we'll leave this coward behind in the Tempest. Both of you arm yourselves with some hand grenades, and guard me when I go up for the diamond."

They both assented.

Each of the trio was attired in his suit of insulated armor. Besides, they were armed with knives and revolvers.

Jack procured the tools he thought necessary from the storeroom, and when his friends got the grenades they electrified the Tempest to keep the natives away from her and alighted.

A yell pealed from the Australians when they observed the trio mount the pedestal to the idol, and a shower of spears, hatchets, knives, and stones were hurled at them.

None of these weapons were capable of hurting any of the trio, although they were struck by many of them.

"Keep close together," cautioned Jack.

"When ve vhas ter fire dese?" Fritz asked anxiously.

"As soon as they break from cover to attack us."

"Lord! Them 'ere rocks wot they've a-heavin' hits like cannon balls," growled Tim, staggering from a violent blow just dealt him.

They reached the head of the statue, which fortunately lay recumbent, and Jack set to work with a chisel and hammer at the diamond.

His object soon became apparent to the natives, for a veritable howl pealed from their lips, and hundreds of them rushed from the rooms into the courtyard, hurling their weapons.

"Go for dem!" roared Fritz, raising a grenade in his hand.

"Hold on!" interposed Jack, quietly.

"Wot's ther matter now, lad?" asked Tim.

"Remember, they have a right to defend their own property. Spare them. Wait till they run up the stairs at us."

"Ay, now—ther lad's right," admitted Tim.

Jack paid no attention to the missiles.

He was dealt several blows, but doggedly worked on, his suit of metal amply protecting him from injury.

He found that the gold imbedding the diamond was soft enough to work easily, and soon had half the setting cut away.

The bulk and weight of the idol impressed him with its immense value, for it was all made of solid gold, and in civilization would have been worth a very large fortune if sold.

There was no possibility then of removing it, however, so he kept on working at the great diamond.

Maddened beyond all endurance by seeing our friends resisting successfully the volleys of weapons hurled at them, the blacks rushed toward them, although it was their firm belief that our friends were possessed of charmed lives.

Seeing them coming Jack worked faster and faster, and Tim

and Fritz each prepared for the struggle they saw was about to ensue.

In half a minute the whole dusky crowd surrounded the base of the pedestal, when Rockwell began to fire at them from the engine and Tim and Fritz began to sling the bombs.

Report after report rang out as the bombs burst among the blacks, with glaring flashes of fire, and with yells of terror the natives recoiled, falling over each other in their frenzy to get out of the way of the shells.

"Hain't ye got it yet, lad?" hoarsely asked Tim.

"Pretty near," replied the boy, pounding away furiously.

"Here dey come again," yelled Fritz.

Bang! Bang! rattled another volley of bombs.

Down went more of the blacks.

By this time the ground was strewn with the wounded, and Rockwell poured an incessant fusillade from the engine.

Back recoiled the blacks again, and a tremendous shower of boomerangs and spears were hurled at the adventurers.

Faster worked Jack, cutting away at the gold that held the diamond, and then he finally loosened it.

He dug out the gem.

It fell into his hand.

"Hurrah! I've got it," he cried.

"Bravo!" yelled Fritz, delightedly.

"Ther coast's clear! Back ter the Tempest!" shouted Tim. They hurried down the steps, when along came a stone, and striking Jack, he was knocked head over heels to the ground.

A cry of exultation pealed from the blacks and several of them rushed forward and surrounded the boy.

Their spears were aimed at him in a circle and flung, but they broke against his metal suit and fell harmless to the ground.

He bounded to his feet, but ere he could do anything the natives sprang at him and made an effort to recover the diamond.

Jack fought to prevent it, but one of the blacks knocked it from his hand and tripped him up.

Down went the boy again, and the black snatched up the big diamond and started off with it at a run.

A cry of alarm pealed from the young inventor's lips.

"The diamond!" he gasped. "It's gone."

Bang! came a shot from Fritz's pistol.

With a wild yell the savage who stole the gem dropped dead, and with a flying jump the fat boy reached him and picked up the stone, while Tim drove away the men menacing Jack with his pistol.

The boy got upon his feet and Fritz joined him.

"Here vhas der stone," said the Dutch boy, handing it over.

"Back to the 'Tempest!" exclaimed Jack, as he took it.

They rushed away just as a large body of the blacks came flying toward them, and climbed up on the deck of the engine, followed by a volley of missiles that did them no harm.

Into the pilot-house they dashed and locked the door.

Some of the natives, in their frenzy, attempted to get up on the engine, but the moment they touched the electrified machine they felt the current and recoiled, screaming like madmen.

"Have you got it?" eagerly asked Rockwell.

"Here it is," the boy replied, triumphantly.

He held the great diamond up for inspection, and a cry of intense delight pealed from Rockwell, and he eagerly made an effort to grasp it, crying hoarsely in the meantime:

"Let me have it. Let me have it."

"Hold on!" sharply interposed the boy, recoiling and pushing him back. "Wait! I'll keep it in my hands till we get back to civilization again, if you please, Oliver Rockwell!"

A ferocious look crossed the man's face.

"What!" he yelled. "Ain't I to get my share?"

"In due time," replied the boy coolly.

"But I demand the custody of it."

"And you won't get it."

A baleful look crept into Rockwell's eyes, and his hands flew to his belt, when Tim hobbled in front of him and roared:

"Belay that, yer lubber, this ain't no time fer fightin'!"

The man gnashed his teeth with rage, and shaking his finger at Jack, he drew back and hissed warningly:

"Look out! This ain't fair play, Wright. I'll have that stone in my hands before long—now mind what I tell you."

"You'll have to catch me napping if you do!" the boy replied.

"Don't ve vhas goin' ter get outd of dis now before night?" asked Fritz.

"At once," said Jack, thrusting the diamond in the bosom of his shirt. "All go to your posts at once, and we'll start."

Rockwell glared at him, and obeyed with the rest.

Jack then grasped the wheel, and starting the machinery, he turned the Tempest around, and headed her for the big door.

Upon seeing what his intention was, a crowd of the blacks got in the way of the machinery to obstruct its exit from the courtyard.

Seeing what their intention was the boy turned the lever all the way around, and the Tempest shot straight ahead like an avalanche, and plunged into the midst of the crowd.

Nothing human could remain long in the way of such a terrific charge as that, and amid an awful outburst of woe the destructive engine ripped its way through the living barrier.

But a way out was cleared, and the Tempest went rushing from the temple.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ASSASSIN'S WORK.

"Drive her ahead, Tim, the whole village is after us!" cried Jack.

"Ay, lad, I'll sail her inter ther bush again in no time," replied the sailor.

And away through the city of metal dashed the Tempest, with an army of the Australians rushing after her, flinging weapons, shouting, and half maddened over their loss of the diamond.

Tim steered the engine with consummate skill, and as the darkness of night settled down upon the scene, Jack turned on the electric lights.

Like a demon the Tempest tore through the village, her powerful searchlight streaking ahead through the gorge, the wind sighing a mournful refrain, and the stars peeping out one by one in the azure dome above.

Up the declivity she rushed, and out of the gorge she dashed, and back into her original track she flew, fast distancing the yelling horde in back, until they finally left the blacks miles in the rear.

Not until then did they feel safe.

"Slow up, Tim!" came the boy's order.

"Slow it is, lad," was the prompt reply, as Tim obeyed.

The Tempest now ran along smoothly, for by following her old course she did not have to rip her way through the scrub.

Fritz now cooked their supper, and perfectly assured that they would not be molested by the blacks, they brought the Tempest to a pause.

When the meal was partaken of, Jack produced the dia-

"We can all have a good look at it now," he laughed, as he handed it to Tim for inspection. "What do you think of

The old sailor's solitary eye stuck out of his head as he sized it up.

"Thunder!" he gasped. "Wot a beauty! But—"

"But what?"

"I once had a bigger one."

"You did? Impossible. This is the biggest diamond in the world."

"Not by a long shot."

"Where did you ever see a bigger one than that, may I ask?"

"It happened when I wuz aboard o' ther ole frigate Wabash that—"

Jack and Fritz interrupted him with a prolonged groan, for they saw that he was about to spring one of his brain-splitting yarns on them.

"Wot's ther matter?" asked Tim, in surprise. "Are yer sick?"

"I don't vant ter hear dot story," said Fritz, vehemently.

"Neither do I." said Jack, in positive tones.

"Then b'gosh, I'll tell it ter Rockwell," said Tim, and turning to the person in question, he began rapidly with: "Our ship wuz a-lyin' off ther coast o' Brazil one night when a nigger swum out an' begged me ter take him aboard. I did so, an' he ses as he worked in ther diamond mines as a slave, but wanted ter git free. 'Take me away from here,' ses he, 'an' I'll gi' ye a diamond as big roun' as a plate.' I ses I would, an' wi' that he pulls out a whopper from under his coat, an' han's it ter me—"

"A whopper?" growled Rockwell, in mystified tones.

"Ay, a big diamond," explained Tim, nodding. "It weighed twenty pounds. I ast him what he got it, an' he ses in ther mine. 'But how did yer smuggle it past the keeper?' I ses. Wi' that he bared his leg an' showed me a big hole he'd cut in it. 'I fastened it in there,' ses he, 'till I got out o' ther mine. Then I made a break fer ther shore with it ter purchase my freedom,' and then he ses—"

"Hold on," exclaimed Jack in disgust.

"Wot now?" growled the old sailor.

"The diamond weighed twenty pounds and was as big as a plate?"

"Ay, that's wot I said," answered Tim.

"How big was the man's leg to hold such a stone?" asked Jack.

"He had a wooden leg," replied the sailor triumphantly. Every one laughed, for Tim had got the best of the boy.

Fritz examined the diamond critically.

"Dot must weigh at least sex pounds," he remarked.

"Every bit of that," said Jack.

"Und it vhas vort' somedings like a million dollar alretty."

"Let me see it," eagerly asked Rockwell, holding out his hand.

Fritz passed it over, when a movement on Jack's part made Rockwell glance up at the young inventor.

The boy had pulled a pistol from his belt and laid it on the table.

"What did you do that for?" queried the outlaw, uneasily.

"To guard against any treachery on your part," replied Jack quietly.

"Ridiculous. Why should you be so confoundedly suspicious of me?"

"I'll tell you, Rockwell," replied the boy; "you have constantly been under my surveillance since the time you broke your oath by aiding the bushmen to escape."

"But I renewed the oath, and you said you trusted me."

"In dealing with such treacherous fellows as you are it is necessary to fight them with their own weapons."

"Then you are a liar and a thief!" sneered Rockwell.

"Sir!" replied the boy angrily, as he sprang to his feet.

"Keep cool, lad," cautioned Tim soothingly.

"But this fellow's insults—"

"Listen," coolly said Rockwell. "You just admitted you lied to me."

"For a purpose of protection against you—a notorious criminal."

"Well, didn't you help me to steal this diamond from the natives?"

Jack did not reply.

He was stung by the man's accusations.

Liar and thief! Oh, how he writhed under the epithets!

"Have you proof that the diamond belonged to the blacks?" he asked.

"No. It, to all appearances, was in the idol centuries," replied Rockwell.

"There was no crime in taking it," said the boy. "It was part of an idol, worshiped in lieu of God, and wresting such an object from infidels is no crime in the eyes of the Almighty."

Rockwell winced at this argument and examined the diamond.

When he finished Jack held out his hand.

"Hand the stone back," said he.

"What for? Ain't I half owner of it?" asked Rockwell.

"I stipulate that I am to keep possession of it till it's sold."

"That isn't fair," remarked Rockwell, in dissatisfied tones.

"Remember, I am the dictator—not you."

"But—"

"Perhaps this will persuade you."

Jack leveled his revolver at the man as he spoke, and turning pale in the face, Rockwell reluctantly handed the stone to the boy.

"You needn't be so mean about it," he snarled.

"As I am suspicious of you," replied the boy, pocketing the diamond, "and don't want you to elope with it as soon as our backs are turned, I think I will get fairer play by hanging on to it myself."

The man ground his teeth with rage, and arose from the table with a singularly guilty look upon his white face.

"We will come to a better understanding about the stone by and by," said he, in significant tones, as he walked out of the pilot-house.

When he was gone Jack faced his friends.

"It's dangerous to have that fellow aboard with us," he exclaimed.

"Donnervetter! I hobe me dot yer vasn'd avraid of him?" asked Fritz.

"No—but I suspect there will be foul play aboard the Tempest if he is allowed to have his own way long," replied Jack, meaningly.

"Bless yer soul! Why not git rid o' him, then?" promptly asked Tim.

"I must keep my word with the wretch," replied Jack. "I can't help being honorable with him, even if he is a highwayman."

"Vell, mebbe I don't petter vatch him somedimes," said Fritz.

"That's the best we can do," replied Jack.

They entered the pilot-house presently, and as soon as they went in Rockwell left and retired to his berth.

Jack started the engine off again and remained conversing with his friends up to midnight, by which time the Tempest was many leagues from the metal village.

Then the boy turned in, leaving Tim and Fritz on duty.

He placed the diamond under his pillow, and glancing at the Australian, saw that he was apparently fast asleep.

Tired out, Jack soon fell into a deep slumber.

Half an hour slipped by, when Rockwell quietly arose upon

his elbow and peered out at Tim and Fritz, who stood at the wheel.

They were laughing and talking in low tones, and had their backs turned toward the ex-bushman at that moment.

Satisfied with his scrutiny, he withdrew a vial and a sponge from his pocket, and uncorking the little bottle, he poured its liquid contents upon the sponge and crept across the room.

Making his way toward the pilot-house door, he picked up a ramrod, fastened a sponge to the end, and without making the least sound, he thrust the drugged sponge over toward Tim's head and held it there.

The old sailor inhaled the volatile fumes presently, and complained of feeling sleepy, whereupon Fritz told him to lie down.

There was a sofa in the pilot-house, and Rockwell hid while the drowsy sailor lay down and fell into a stupid sleep.

Unsuspecting of danger, Fritz remained there alone, when Rockwell crept up behind him, seized him by the throat, and stifling the cry of alarm that arose to his lips, he clapped the saturated sponge to the Dutch boy's lips and held it there.

In a minute Fritz was drugged, laid on the floor, and no more noise had been made about the matter than if nothing unusual had occurred.

The Australian then fastened the wheel.

A sardonic smile crossed Rockwell's face.

He withdrew a dagger from the sheath of his pocket, and then silently crept back to the sleeping apartment.

A moment later he hovered over Jack.

The boy was profoundly sleeping and the rascal hissed:

"And now to kill him and get the diamond!"

He raised his dagger over the boy's bared bosom, and without the least hesitation he aimed a deadly stab at Jack's heart.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HIGHWAY ROBBERS.

"Oh, oh! Blast you! Help! Poor Polly! poor Polly!"

Rockwell started back, uttering an imprecation, and there came a wild fluttering under his feet, for the parrot had been standing on the floor beside Jack's berth and he stepped on the bird.

Up sprang Jack in a twinkling, aroused by the noise.

One glance showed him the dagger in Rockwell's hand, and he realized at once that an attempt was to be made to kill him.

With a bound the boy landed on the floor.

Smash! went his fist against Rockwell's nose as quick as a flash.

Back reeled the Australian, uttering a cry and dropping his weapon.

"Assassin!" cried the exasperated boy.

"Oh, I didn't do anything," groaned Rockwell.

"No. The parrot interrupted you."

"I swear to you. Wright—"

"Don't lie. Drop that false, hypocritical tone."

"But I tell you—"

"Tim, Fritz! Come here."

No reply was returned, and glancing through into the pilot-house Jack saw that they were both fast asleep.

"Drugged!" cried the startled boy, as he snatched up a pistol.

With a yell of fear Rockwell rushed into the dining-room and sprang through one of the open windows head first.

He landed on the platform.

Scrambling up he sprang to the ground and dove into the scrub.

Jack saw him disappear, and turning over his pillow he observed that the diamond was all right.

"He didn't get it after all," thought the boy, gleefully.

Then he rushed into the pilot-house and stopped the engine.

Tim and Fritz he saw were only sleeping, and he made every effort to arouse them without success.

The odor of chloroform remained, and as soon as Jack caught a sniff he knew what it was.

"Chloroform, as I suspected," he muttered.

The boy knew of an antidote for this drug, and by the use of it he presently aroused Tim and told him what happened.

The Dutch boy was more under the influence of the drug than the old sailor was, and therefore was harder to awaken.

Fully an hour passed by ere he was aroused, and even then he was so dull and stupid that they had great trouble to make him understand what had just transpired.

The indignation of the boy's two friends knew no bounds when they discovered the full extent of the rascally work Rockwell did.

"Where vhas he?" gasped the fat boy, wildly, when he got upon his feet. "Let me got ad him. Och, Shiminey Christ-mass, vill some vun gief me a slung-shot till I knock me his brains against der roof."

"The wretch has made his escape," said Jack.

"Blast his figger-head," growled Tim, "an' without a shot in his locker!"

"I didn't have time to drop him."

"Let me go and search for him," pleaded Fritz wildly.

"No. It wouldn't do any good. He's too far off by this time."

"Didn't ther cussed swab git away wi' nuthin?" asked Tim. "Oh, no—nothing but his life."

"He don't von't haf dot long if I meed him again alretty!"

When order was restored Jack started the engine off again, for it was utterly useless to try and catch the treacherous felon on account of the darkness and the density of the bush.

In order to overcome the effect of the drug, Jack made his two friends remain up all night.

When day broke they were past Lake Tyrrell and came across a road which Jack resolved to pursue to the southward.

"We have nothing more to do but run down Captain Moonlight and his band now, boys," said the young inventor, "so we will beat about these roads till we find some trace of them."

The Tempest was brought to a pause in the afternoon at the base of a rocky hill, up on which Jack observed a number of molochs, covered with tubercles, bearing large spines that lent them a strange appearance, spiny ant-eaters, wild-cats, and mound-raising negapodes.

The shrubbery was filled with bower-building satin birds, honey-eaters of various kinds, and among the rock wallabies dashed numberless hare and rat-kangaroos, much smaller than the ordinary kangaroo.

"I'd like to have a shot at some of those birds or beasts," the boy remarked, as he took down his rifle. "While I'm gone you can both overhaul the Tempest, and if there is anything in need of attention see to it. I will return in a short time."

"Best not to be gone long," said Tim.

"Why—what's the matter?"

"See ther sky yonder?"

"It looks threatening."

"Don't they have monsoon storms in this country?"

"You are right, Tim; and they are dangerous, too."

Joe shouldered his rifle, left the engine, and plunging in among the rocks he disappeared from the view of his

The boy ascended the hill by a tortuous route, and paused presently upon seeing a snake coiled up on the ground ahead of him.

He fired a shot at it, and the ball nearly tore it to pieces.

Upon examination he found it to be a python, but it was a harmless snake and he continued on.

When Jack reached the summit of the hill he had a clear view of the surrounding country for miles about, and in the distance observed a train of mules with packs on their backs, while they were attended by a number of miners.

They were evidently a party of successful treasure hunters going toward Melbourne with the result of their work, and as the boy turned his glance off to the left of where they were going, he was startled to see a number of dark objects creeping through the bush toward the miners.

They were seen to be men.

A few moments afterwards the boy heard the report of a rifle.

It was quickly followed by several more, and he then observed that the men lurking in the bush had fired upon the miners.

It made Jack start.

"An attack!" he muttered.

And with that he ran down-hill at full speed.

He surmised that the attacking party was a gang of thieves, if not Captain Moonlight's notorious band.

"I'd like to earn the governor's reward of five thousand pounds to break up the gang," the boy muttered, as he ran along.

All ideas of gunning for game now left his mind, for he made a sudden resolution to board the Tempest, fly to the scene of the affray, and investigate the matter.

The moment he reached the road again his heart sank.

Fritz and Tim had faithfully carried out his order to have the engine overhauled, and now had considerable of her machinery apart, cleaning and oiling it.

"Who's der matter?" asked Fritz, startled by seeing him return so soon.

"Don't you hear those gunshots?" panted the boy.

Both listened intently.

"Ay, now; an' who's a-firin'?" asked Tim.

"A party of miners was attacked just now by some bushmen."

"Whar is they, lad?"

"About half a mile along this road to the south."

"Keel haul me now, an' did yer intend ter run 'em down?"

"Of course I did; but it seems impossible now."

"Ve fix dot machineries ub so soon as ve could," said Fritz.

The three set to work upon the engine and adjusted the parts as quickly as possible.

Because they were in such great haste, it seemed as if their work progressed slowly; but they soon had the engine ready, and hastily boarding her, they went flying along the road.

In the coarse of a few minutes they shot around a bend in the road and burst upon the scene of a hot fight.

The mule train had come to a pause, its owners were engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict with twice their number, and a most desperate fight was going on.

"There's Captain Moonlight now!" exclaimed Jack, pointing ahead.

And he told the truth, for the giant leader of the bushmen was fighting at one side of the road two men at once.

"Hurrah! They sees us, lad!" roared Tim.

The engine dashed on, and Tim and Fritz, encased in their metal suits, stood on the front platform, and began to open fire upon the thieves with rifles.

As soon as the highwaymen saw the Tempest coming, they

scattered, and rushed for the scrub to screen themselves, and the attacked miners gazed at Jack's engine in astonishment.

On she rushed, and seeing a body of the men plunge into the bush together, with Captain Moonlight at their head, the boy steered the engine straight toward them.

Into the scrub flew the Tempest, much to the bushmen's amazement, and with a buzzing of her blades up into the air flew a shower of hedge wood.

On ran the flying thieves, but faster came the terrible engine Tim and Fritz blazing away and dropping them one by one until out of this party none remained but the leader.

Captain Moonlight saw that he was marked as Jack's prey and observed with feelings of despair that he could not escape.

Like some wild beast driven at bay he suddenly paused, and turning around faced the Tempest.

CHAPTER XX.

CAPTAIN MOONLIGHT IN THE TOILS.

Calling to Tim to take his place at the wheel, Jack took a coil of insulated wire, fastened one end to a binding post on the wall, and joining Fritz on the forward deck, he saw Captain Moonlight halt.

The big fellow stood glaring balefully at the engine, and raising a brace of pistols in his hands, he aimed and fired at Jack and Fritz.

Both bullets struck their intended victims.

But they glanced harmlessly from the metal suits.

"Missed!" hissed the outlaw.

"Slack up, Tim!" ordered Jack.

"Ay, ay, lad!" was the cheery reply.

The bushman fired again, but failed to hit his victims.

"Stop firing, you can't hurt us!" cried Jack mockingly.

"By heavens, you must be bewitched!" roared Captain Moonlight.

"Not charmed, but incased in suits of mail," replied Jack.

Just then the Tempest arrived within a dozen paces of the robber chief, and Jack made a motion to the sailor, signaling him to stop her.

Tim obeyed.

"Catch this line!" shouted Jack.

He flung it toward Captain Moonlight.

The coils unwound and struck the giant in the face, when he unguardedly dropped his pistols and seized it, intending to tear the wire away.

Unfortunately for him, he got an electric shock that made him feel as if he was pierced by rows of needles.

And once he caught hold of the wire he could not let go again.

"Maledictions upon you!" he yelled, in surprise, as he wildly endeavored to shake the live wire from his hands; "what's this?"

"Oh, you are caught now!" said Jack with a laugh.

"You've electrified me!" shouted the captain, madly.

"Certainly. That's just what I intended doing."

The boy seized a piece of stout cord, and descending from the Tempest, he approached the raving and swearing outlaw.

"Captain Moonlight," said the boy, coolly, "you are my prisoner!"

And ere the ruffian could resist Jack bound him hand and foot..

Fritz joined the boy, and between them they carried the writhing and struggling wretch aboard of the engine, with the electric wire still attached to his hands, and laid him in the bedroom.

Despite his great strength, desperation, and prowess, he was as a child now, overpowered by the terrible electric current.

"Stop it!" he yelled. "Do you want to kill me?"

"Tim, turn off the current," said Jack, quietly.

The old sailor obeyed, and the giant bellowed:

"That's better. Why didn't you do it before?"

"See here!" said Jack.

"What do you want?"

"I'm going to ask you a few questions."

"Well, I won't answer them."

"Then I'll turn on the battery again."

"For Heaven's sake don't."

"Will you answer, then?"

"No," was the dogged reply.

"Tim, shock him."

"Oh," yelled the bandit, squirming spasmodically as Tim complied.

"If you don't answer you'll get it twice as hard," said Jack.

"Shut her off! I'll speak—I'll speak."

"Good! Tim, stop it."

"Ay, ay."

"What do you want to ask?"

"Where I can capture your gang."

"I won't tell you."

"Tim, get the current ready again to—"

"No—stop! I'll obey."

"Do so, then."

"They are scattered all through the bush."

"I know that much myself. But I want to find your rendezvous."

"We don't have any."

"You lie!"

"I swear it."

"Tim, give him five hundred volts."

The old sailor turned the lever around once more, and the captain uttered a scream that awakened the echoes far and near, his legs and arms began to bend, a look of agony crossed his face.

He was suffering frightfully from the awful current, his body twitched spasmodically, and he gasped, in hoarse tones:

"You—are—killing—me!"

"Answer me truthfully, then!"

"Oh, God! I—can't—stand—this—much—longer!"

"I won't stop the current now till you reply."

"Thursday—at Black Hawk caves!" yelled the outlaw.

"What do you mean by that?"

"That's—where—the—band—will—meet!"

"Where are the caves?"

"Near—the—Red—Light—Inn."

Jack motioned to Tim to stop the current, and when the sailor obeyed there came a look of intense relief over the outlaw's face.

"Are you willing to show us the place?" asked Jack.

"I'll do anything to avoid getting shocked again."

"We will hold you to your word. But if you deceive us I will shock you with a heavier current—do you hear?"

"Great Heaven, don't do it again," implored the shuddering man.

"How are we to reach the caves?"

"Only by going through the bush in back of the inn."

"Very well. I'll try it. I've engaged to break up your gang, and I'll do it at any hazard. What time will your men be there?"

"Nine o'clock at night."

The outlaw answered without the least hesitation now, for he was now in deadly terror of the fearful electric apparatus.

Jack got Tim and Fritz to bind him to the wall so that it was an utter impossibility for him to get free without assist-

ance, and then went into the pilot-house and started the engine.

Turning the Tempest around, the boy headed her back for the road, and arrived there after a few minutes.

All of the miners had been busy collecting the bodies of their own party who had been shot, burying the dead, and caring for the wounded, securing the wounded bandits, and tossing the bodies of the ones they had killed in a heap by the roadside.

"Hello, there," said the leader of the party, as the Tempest rolled up to them. "What in thunder do you call that machine, anyway?"

"An electrical engine, and you can thank it for saving your party from certain destruction," answered Jack, stopping the Tempest.

"By Jove, it's a queer affair. But we owe you our lives."

"Wasn't they beating you when we came up?"

"Badly. We were outnumbered considerably."

"Did you lose many men?"

"Four dead and six wounded."

"And the bushmen?"

"We've let daylight through seven. Here are ten wounded. But they've killed several of our mules, unluckily."

"What have you got them laden with—gold?"

"Of course; that's what the bushmen are after."

"What became of the rest of the gang?"

"They've escaped into the scrub."

"Can we do anything for you?"

"You've done enough."

"Where are you bound for?"

"Melbourne."

"As these wounded bushmen are of no use to you I'll take them aboard of my engine, and put them under arrest. I'll carry them to Melbourne, as I am going that way."

"I wish we could travel in your company for protection."

"You can, as I am in no hurry."

The miners distributed the packs on the dead mules among the rest of the animals, and gladly availed themselves of Jack's offer to carry their wounded companions on the Tempest.

All the wounded prisoners were packed in the store-rooms, deprived of their weapons, and the door was locked after them.

Caged up in this manner they were as safe as if in a prison, and the extra weight did not interfere any with the Tempest's movements.

In the course of an hour everything was in readiness for the start, and they got under way for the city headed by the engine.

The mules did not travel very fast, but the journey was sure and in due course of time the whole party drew near Melbourne without seeing any further signs of the outlaws.

The Red Light Inn was passed on Thursday afternoon late, but it had a dark, deserted air, as its keeper had fled with the bushmen.

Here a farmer was met, with a large dray of produce, which Jack purchased in consideration of him carrying the wounded men and prisoners to the city, and the transfer was accordingly made.

The boy retained possession of Captain Moonlight, however, and when the miners started off with the farmer, they thanked Jack over and over again for what he did for them, and promised to put the wounded bandits in the hands of the authorities.

Rid of all encumbrances now, the Tempest was driven down a side road, and our friends began to map out a plan of action, when upon turning a bend, they ran in front of an approaching troop of soldiers.

They were guard-men of Melbourne, all mounted on horses,

and came to a sudden pause upon seeing the Tempest approaching.

CHAPTER XXI.

INTO THE ROBBERS' CAVE.

The soldiers were gazing at the prairie engine with looks of the most intense amazement, and obeying their commanding officer's order, they came to a halt, filling the road.

Jack drove the Tempest up to within a hundred yards of them, when the lieutenant in charge rode on in advance of his troops and cried:

"Halt!"

Jack brought the engine to a pause.

"By what right do you stop me?" he asked.

"I wish to find out who you are, sir."

"My name is Jack Wright."

"Ah. I heard of you and your engine at Melbourne."

"Then you are satisfied, I presume?"

"Perfectly, as you are on the same errand as I am."

"Indeed! How came you to go in search of the bushmen?"

"When you went away a band of them were making such depredations close to the city that we were ordered out to drive them away."

"The party you pursued must then have been a wing of Captain Moonlight's main body," said Jack, "for I have been in pursuit of the noted chief and that part of the gang under his immediate command."

"Very likely," assented the officer, after a moment's thought. "At any rate, they all managed to elude us in the bush without losing a man. We have been camping out ever since, having skirmishes now and then, and to-day we made an important discovery."

"To what do you allude?"

"We saw that Oliver Rockwell, the bandit's old lieutenant, was with the gang and evidently in command of them."

"Ah! Then the rascal must have made his way back here ahead of us. He probably secured a horse somewhere," said Jack to his two friends, for the army officer's words surprised him.

"Have you had any success?" queried the lieutenant.

"We have captured Captain Moonlight!"

"Indeed!"

"And forced him to tell us where his men have their rendezvous."

"Excellent. This is a very lucky stroke."

"To-night at nine they meet at the Black Hawk caves."

"You don't say! Why, I know where they are, and we can attack them."

"That was just what we were planning. Let us join forces, sir."

"Most willingly," assented the lieutenant, delightedly.

Jack then invited the officer to come aboard of the Tempest and hold an interview with the captive bandit, and he complied.

He was very much amazed to see Captain Moonlight, and put question after question to him as to the easiest mode of attacking the caves, the number of men stationed there, the usual sentry posts, and many other important details.

The rendezvous was about a mile away, and its approach was almost impassable on horseback, owing to the density of the thicket, but once the location was known it would be an easy matter to have his men surround the cave and close in on them.

As for the Tempest—they could only drive her pell-mell through the scrub, and let her cut her way to the rocky spot.

When night fell upon the scene, preparations were made for the attack and the whole party set off.

All the horses were put up in the stable of the deserted inn, and having given instructions to his men, the lieutenant sent them off in a circle to surround the rendezvous.

"Give the bushmen no quarter," was the order. "Every one of them are murderers, and you may shoot them down at sight."

"I will start in from the back of the inn," said Jack, "and if the cavern entrance is as big as I am told, I will send the Tempest into it and drive the bushmen out when our men can get them and so end the matter."

With this agreement a couple of men were left to guard the horses and stores, and Jack and the officer separated.

Tim and Fritz had been busy preparing the arms, closing up the doors and windows, and getting on their suits of armor.

They entered the pilot-house, and Tim said:

"Ye kin git under weigh now, lad, as everything is in ship-shape order."

"I vhas got enough grenades retty ter plo' ub der whole Australia," added Fritz, "und I vhas retty ter do dot single-handed mineselluf."

"Then we won't light up till we reach the caves," said Jack, "as our illuminator would put the bushmen upon their guard."

"Ay, now, but ther noise we'll make a-goin' through ther bush will attack them," said Tim dubiously. "Thar's no gittin' over that. When I wuz aboard o' ther ole frigate Wabash."

"You ain't there now," dryly interposed Jack.

"We wanted to steal up on ther enemy one dark night as quiet as mice," continued Tim, unabashed, "when ther wind arose, an' begun ter flap ther waves agin our hull, an' then it screeched through our riggin' as if all ther lubbers in Sailor's Snug Harbor'd begun ter whistle tergether."

"Donner und blitzen, gief us a rest vonst!" growled Fritz.

"We kep' sailin' ahead, though," Tim went on, scornfully ignoring the fat boy; "an' then, wot d'yer think? Ther enemy, instid o' suspectin' it wuz us, thought we wuz thar consort an' spoke us, when we ups an' bangs away at 'em, an' busted 'em ter smithereens. Come ter find out, though, we'd been a-firin' at our own consort, wot stood between ther enemy an' ourselves, an' when day broke thar wuz ther hull crew a-floatin' in ther water wi' life-preservers, an' ther vessel gone. Not one o' our friends got even a scratch, an' ther cannon balls a-flyin' clear through ther ship, battered ther enemy's ship so hard she sunk, an' all han's wuz lost. Then we—"

But just at this juncture Jack drove the Tempest into the bush, drowning the rest of Tim's lies, and he had to stop.

Along the engine plunged fiercely, gashing the bushes to pieces that stood in her way, and she made rapid progress toward the Black Hawks caves, in back of the Red Light Inn.

Fortunately the storm which had been threatening now burst with a terrific gale of wind and torrents of rain, and the noise it made half drowned the sound made by the engine.

Within five minutes a lightning flash revealed to Jack the outlines of a great mass of rocks, among which were the caves in question, but unluckily it also showed the Tempest to a sentry, who was lurking in the bushes near by.

He uttered a cry, discharged his rifle at the engine, and ran to the caves to warn his companions of the threatening danger.

The Tempest reached a huge opening in the rocks about the same time the man did, and Tim fired at him.

The ball brought him down, but the sound of the discharge, rising above the noise of the storm, brought a gang of the bushmen to the entrance of the cave peering out.

Into the midst flashed the prairie engine a moment later, cutting down every one who stood in her way.

They who escaped scattered and fled into the caves, yelling a warning to the rest.

The Tempest pursued them, and ran into a tremendous cavern, around the walls of which a number of lamps were fastened, while in the center there blazed a big fire.

A dim glow illuminated the place, but the light sufficed to show Jack that there was a large party of men there.

As soon as the bushmen saw the Tempest they fired at it with rifles and pistols, a deafening report ensuing.

The bullets crashed against the wire walls of the engines, but flattened there, unable to penetrate to the inmates.

Jack turned on all the electric lights, flooding the big cave with a brilliant glow, and by its light he saw that there were scores of ruffians in the place, all of whom were armed to the teeth.

"Fire upon them, boys!" exclaimed the young inventor.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

No sooner had Jack's order been given, when the sailor and the Dutch boy flung open the side windows and began to fling out the hand-grenades among the bushmen.

These projectiles burst with deafening reports, scattering a hail of destructive iron and the stone they broke among the highwaymen.

Volley after volley was returned by Captain Moonlight's men, but they soon saw how futile every effort was to injure our friends, while they, on the other hand, were suffering great losses from the destructive bombs which Tim and Fritz steadily rained among them.

They began to lose courage.

And when Jack started the Tempest flying toward them, and they saw that the terrible knife-blades were threatening to cut them down, they scattered and made a rush for the cave entrance.

This was just what Jack wanted.

"Make it hot for them now," he exclaimed, as he turned the engine around, and drove it after them, "for once we drive the beggars out, the militia will soon put an end to them!"

Fast and furious flew the bombs from Tim's and Fritz's hands.

"Lord!" gasped the sailor. "They're a-fallin' over each other in their haste to get out. Fire at them fellers off ter ther right, Fritz, an' I'll go fer ther lubbers on ther left."

"Ach, dis vhas like drifin' sheebs to der marget," laughed Fritz, whose warlike disposition was satisfied with just this sort of work.

Bang! bang! rattled the shots.

None were returned, for the outlaws knew it would be utterly useless to fire at them, as they could not reach our friends.

The Tempest rushing up behind the bushmen hastened their movements, and in a remarkably short time they were out of the big cave and plunging into the bushes.

Here they were met by the soldiers, and shots pealed out among the thickets thick and fast.

It became very evident to the outlaws that they were in a terrible ambuscade, from which there was no escaping a wholesale massacring, and it terrified them.

"Surrender, boys, or we'll all get killed," yelled a voice in the gloom.

"We give in," they screamed on all sides.

"Fling down your arms and file into the clearing, then."

souted the voice of the leader of the soldiers in stern tones. "Yes, yes, we surrender," was the universal cry.

Weapons were flung aside, and as the soldiers came closing in on them they found that they were surrounded.

There was no alternative except to give up, and bitter as it was, they all did so, as they knew they would get shot down like sheep in a shamble if they didn't.

The stern law of the military would show them no quarter, and with the courage frightened out of them the rascals were all bound and rendered prisoners by the soldiers.

A number of them were shot, but they were all collected and surrounded by the soldiers, with guns ready to drop the first man who attempted to escape; they were marched along the path cut by the Tempest with the engine leading the way.

"It's a complete victory, Mr. Wright," said the lieutenant, who rode on the engine beside Jack, "and we owe everything to you."

"I have kept my word," replied the boy. "My business in this country was principally to hunt down the bushmen, and I've broken up their lawless gang with your assistance. There is nothing to keep us here any longer. Let us return to Melbourne."

When they reached the inn, those of the bushmen who were shot dead were laid out on the floor.

Jack glanced them over, and gave a start, for the first face among them upon which his eyes rested was that of Oliver Rockwell, the bushman's lieutenant.

He was dead.

A ball from the rifle of one of the soldiers had pierced his brain.

"The diamond is mine now," the boy muttered.

With the taking off of Rockwell their partnership was, of course, dissolved, and the ownership of the gem devolved upon Jack alone.

The dead were buried.

Then the soldiers mounted their horses, and surrounding the bushmen, with Jack and his friends in the Tempest at the head, they set out for Melbourne through the wild storm.

It was a lengthy journey.

But they ultimately reached the city.

As the strange cortege passed through the streets, they aroused the amazement of everybody who saw them at that late hour.

The prisoners were escorted to the jail, into which they were locked with Captain Moonlight, and while the soldiers

marched back to their armory, the Tempest was sent flying to the governor's house.

The chief magistrate was up, and cordially welcomed Jack and his friends, who thereupon explained what occurred.

"What," exclaimed the surprised gentleman. "Captain Moonlight and his whole gang captured now?"

"Yes, and locked in the city prison," replied Jack.

"This is amazing, indeed."

"Did you get the two batches of prisoners I sent before?"

"Every one of them. Your work, Mr. Wright, is amazing."

"It is finished now, and as soon as you can dispense with my services at court, where our evidence must go to convict these bushmen, we will depart for America."

"In the meantime, allow me to entertain you here as my guests," warmly said the governor, "and ere you sail, it will be my pleasurable duty to hand you the reward we offered for the arrest and conviction of the bushmen."

Having thus arranged matters satisfactorily, our friends stopped at the governor's house.

The next day the whole city rang with praises for the young inventor and his friends for capturing the bushmen.

They dissected the Tempest, packed it up, put Bismarck and Whiskers in cages, and got everything ready for departure.

In the meantime invitations to receptions, balls, and fetes poured in upon them, and they spent a fine time during the trial of the bushmen.

When our friends had seen the ruffians all convicted they took leave of the governor, and with \$25,000 in their pockets they set sail for San Francisco, taking the Tempest and the monkey and parrot with them.

In due course of time they returned to Wrightstown, and here the reward was divided among them.

The big diamond proved to be of no interest to Tim and Fritz, and as it would have been difficult to find a purchaser for it, the young inventor resolved to keep the stone as a curiosity and did so.

Having stored the Tempest away, our friends resumed their ordinary course of existence in the pretty village, well satisfied with the result of their adventurous trip in Australia.

Various peculiar ideas had occurred to Jack during his absence, and while his friends were engaged with other pursuits, the boy began to build a new and wonderful invention for traveling which had suggested itself to his mind.

We have no space here to give you a description of it, but trust ere long to show our readers what it was, and the strange uses to which Jack and his friends put it.

[THE END.]

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